

## THE CHRISTOLOGY IN THEODORE OF MOPSUESTIA'S COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

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*The article derives from Theodore of Mopsuestia's Commentary on the Gospel of John, wherein Theodore describes how he understood Christ's two natures being united in "one common prosōpon." He regards prosōpon not as a synonym for hypostasis, as the Second Council of Constantinople did, but as the functional union of Christ's two natures acting as one "ego." Theodore finds this understanding in the diverse ways John portrays Christ acting at times as one reality and at other times in clearly divine and human ways, with each presumed in the other.*

THEODORE OF MOPSUESTIA'S SYRIAC *Commentary on the Gospel of John* comes out of the most mature period of his life.<sup>1</sup> The *Commentary* contains all the major facets of his trinitarian theology, Christology, and soteriology, especially the central roles the Holy Spirit plays in the union of Christ's nature, the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist, and in forming the Body of Christ. Marco Conti's 2010 English translation of the *Commentary*

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<sup>1</sup> Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, trans. Marco Conti, ed. Joel C. Elowsky (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2010) (hereafter Conti). For the Syriac text, see J.-M. Vosté, ed. and trans., *Theodori Mopsuesteni Commentarius in Evangelium Johannis Apostoli*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium (Louvain: Officina Orientali, 1940) (hereafter Vosté; page references will be first to the English translation/then to the Syriac) 115–16/62–63. Robert Devreesse has published the extant Greek passages of this work in his *Théodore de Mopsueste* (Vatican City: Vatican, 1948) 305–419 (hereafter, Devreesse); George Kalantzis published an English translation of these extracts in his *Theodore of Mopsuestia: Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Strathfield, NSW: St. Pauls, 2004) (hereafter, Kalantzis). See also Devreesse, *Essai sur Théodore de Mopsueste* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1948).

affords many more readers access to Theodore's thought.<sup>2</sup> While each aspect of his thought deserves in-depth treatment, my aim here is to provide a clearer understanding of his *Commentary*, particularly regarding how he conceived Jesus Christ to be both human and divine within a true unity and of how his humanity plays a unique, essential role in universal salvation.<sup>3</sup>

I first clarify from the text what Theodore means by the principal christological terms that underpin his theological framework. I then apply this understanding of terms to those Johannine passages where he sees John presenting Christ as acting in divine and human ways, while at the same time maintaining the existence of a true unity between his two natures and their ways of acting as one *prosōpon*. Following this, I treat the mediating roles that Theodore sees Christ's humanity playing, together with the Spirit of God, in universal salvation, especially as this closely relates to the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist. I conclude by stressing the need to judge whether Theodore is orthodox or not, in light of what he wrote about the unity of Christ's natures and not to prejudge him because of his condemnation by the Second Council of Constantinople in 553.

### THEODORE'S MAJOR CHRISTOLOGICAL TERMS

The Fathers of Constantinople II anathematized Theodore in their fifth canon. This will serve to highlight Theodore's major christological terms:

If anyone accepts the one *hypostasis* of our Lord Jesus Christ in the following way as signaling many *hypostaseis* and then attempts to introduce two *hypostaseis* or two *prosōpa* into the mystery regarding Christ, and then, after two *prosōpa* have been introduced, speaks only about one *prosōpon* according to dignity, honor, and worship, as Theodore and Nestorius have done in their madness, and then falsely charges that the holy Synod in Chalcedon has employed the phrase "one *hypostasis*" in the same sense as they have done in their impiety, without confessing that the Word of God is truly united to his flesh hypostatically—it is in this sense that the one *hypostasis* or the one *prosōpon* is one (for this is how the holy Synod at Chalcedon has professed the one *hypostasis* of our Lord Jesus Christ)—let such a one be anathema!<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> For those unfamiliar with Theodore's life, I recommend William Smith, *A Dictionary of Christian Biography, Literature, Sects, and Doctrines*, 4 vols., ed. William Smith and Henry Wace (London: John Murray, 1887–1888) 4:444 as a primary source to obtain quotations from those ancient authors who cite Theodore. For the most recent treatments of Theodore, see Kalantzis 3–5; and Conti xvii–xxii. As regards the date of this work, it depends on whether the dedication to Bishop Porphyry in the Syriac text is authentic. If so, this indicates that Theodore wrote his commentary around the first decades of the fifth century.

<sup>3</sup> For a summary of the major theological opinions regarding this role, see my *Theodore of Mopsuestia: The Early Church Fathers* (New York: Routledge, 2009) 34–63.

<sup>4</sup> *Enchiridion symbolorum: Definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, ed. Henry Denzinger and Adolf Schönmetzer, 32nd ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 1963) no. 426. Translations here and throughout this study, unless otherwise

### Theodore's Understanding of *Hypostasis* and *Prosōpon*

The Greek terms *hypostasis* and *prosōpon* both express in general the idea of a “person.” In his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Theodore provides insightful examples of what he means by these terms, especially when he asserts that Christ’s two *prosōpa* are united in one common *prosōpon*. Being a true Antiochene exegete, Theodore has derived his specific meanings of these terms from a literal<sup>5</sup> interpretation of how John has employed them in their own contexts. The meaning of these terms were fluid in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, thus one must realize how Theodore understood them. First, since Christology has been so deeply influenced by Cyril’s understanding of *hypostasis*, I begin with how this term is understood in general.

In ancient times it had two principal but interrelated meanings in Greek, depending on whether one derives *hypostasis* from the middle (*hyphistamai*) or the active forms of *hyphistēmi*.<sup>6</sup> When used in reference to a “person” or a living thing such as a tree, and even an existing object such as the sun, the intransitive meaning adds the notion that a complete nature is an existing individual.

In his *Commentary*, Theodore uses *hypostasis* primarily in reference to human beings and members of the Trinity, as seen in the following passages. For example, he asserts: “How does the word that is being uttered also judge, since it is not a living being (*qenōmā*)?” [12:50].<sup>7</sup> In the following, he rebuts the position of those who deny that the Holy Spirit is an actual divine “Person” who truly possesses the divine nature: “All the statements of those heretics who have foolishly spoken out against this verse (John 10:14) by asserting their rejection of the Spirit’s existence (*qenōmā*), are not, in my opinion, (addressing) the point that we have been discussing here at length.”<sup>8</sup> The following text indicates how the term *hypostasis* can be applied to a thing. Theodore is pointing out that even at night when the sun is not seen, it still exists: “For like the light of the sun when it sets, it may not

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indicated, are my own. For editorial reasons, I have transliterated both the Greek and the Syriac terms.

<sup>5</sup> It is important to understand what Theodore means by a “literal” interpretation. He grants that the Scriptures may be using a term in a metaphorical way or as a type. His focus is solely on what a word itself means in its own context according to the ordinary rational way of interpreting this word.

<sup>6</sup> See Helmut Köster, “*hypostasis*,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich and Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1972) 8:572–89, at 573.

<sup>7</sup> Vosté 250/179; Conti 115a (“a” and “b” refer here and throughout this study to the left and right columns on the page; I also note in square brackets the verse from John’s Gospel that Theodore is commenting on, here 12:50).

<sup>8</sup> Vosté 296/212; Conti 136b.

seem to be existing for those not seeing it. But it is not completely extinguished and lost, as it still remains existing (*qenōmā*) in its substantial nature and reappears at its proper time” [12:36].<sup>9</sup>

While *hypostasis* can denote the existence of a being, it can also span a range of meanings from a concrete source through an existing substantial being. Theodore’s emphasis here is on a specific individual, whether it be a living person or an actually existing thing. Theodore shows that he is fully conscious of this meaning of *hypostasis* as an existing individual when he reacts to what he considers to be Apollinaris’s novel and bizarre use of *hypostasis* as a way to express the “Person” of the Word as one in whom Jesus’ incomplete human nature has been subsumed.<sup>10</sup> For Theodore, this usage destroyed the traditional scriptural understanding that Christ had a complete human nature as well as a divine one. Also he could not conceive of how a *hypostasis* could exist apart from a complete nature in which it inheres and vivifies: “The (Word) is existing in the world by his hypostatic nature” [1:10].<sup>11</sup> The sense is that the Word’s nature is still present and operating in creation. Therefore, within this framework, Theodore had to regard each of Christ’s human and divine natures as existing with its own *hypostasis*. He felt that this was corroborated by the fact that those who encountered Jesus during his earthly life were certain that they were really meeting an existing human being, just as Christians would later maintain that the Word is existing as truly equal with the Father and the Spirit in the Trinity. In other words, when Theodore asserts that there are two *hypostaseis* in Christ, he means that Christ is really and fully existing as God and man.

<sup>9</sup> Devreesse 376; Kalantzis 103. The Greek word “*huparxei*” can be translated as “substance” and “existence.” I have rendered it here “in its own substantial nature.” The Syriac is: “But it still exists in the nature of its *qenōmā*” (Vosté 246/175; Conti 113a). Conti does not translate *qenōmā*.

<sup>10</sup> Theodore expresses this when he insists: “We are prompted to respond because of the faithlessness of those questioning us in a bizarre way, as this [Apollinaris] has done by introducing the novel term *hypostasis*” (*Theodori Mopsuesteni Fragmenta Syriaca*, ed. and trans. Eduard Sachau [Leipzig: G. Engelmann, 1869] fol. 9a–b in Syriac; 50–51 in his Latin translation). Theodore also appears to be alluding to Apollinaris in the following excerpt from his magnum opus, *De incarnatione*: “We establish their unity by combining both the ‘inner and the outer’ in a communal way, so as not to refer (to them) by a single term as though they were united in the same hypostasis” (*Theodori Episcopi Mopsuesteni in Epistolas B. Pauli commentarii*, ed. H. B. Swete, 2 vols. [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University, 1880 and 1882] in the Syriac passage 2:299). Rowan Greer has recently provided the Latin text with an English translation of these minor Pauline Epistles in his *Theodore of Mopsuestia: Commentary on the Minor Pauline Epistles* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), but he has not included the material Swete provides in his Appendix.

<sup>11</sup> This text is found in the alternate reading (Devreesse 314; Kalantzis 50). I have combined *hypostasis* and “nature” into one phrase.

As the following passage indicates, the term *hypostasis/genōmā* can also be translated in a particular context as “one’s true existing self”: “So feed my sheep for me. By repaying the love with which I have loved you, you will be giving back to me the loving kindness due me. For I accept the care you show them, as though it were being done to myself (*genōmā*)” [21:17].<sup>12</sup> This use of *hypostasis/genōmā* as equivalent to one’s own self implies that this term, when taken to mean an existing individual, is not to be understood in a static but in a dynamic way. It signifies that a human (*hypostasis/genōmā*) is one’s true self that perdures throughout one’s life.

### Theodore’s Understanding of *Prosōpon*

Besides the term *hypostasis*, Theodore also uses the term *prosōpon/parçōpā* to express who a “person” is. But *prosōpon/parçōpā* sharply differs in its meaning of “person.” In Greek it primarily refers to the appearance and face of an individual. In its extended meaning, it signifies a mask or the role an actor plays. When the term is governed by prepositions, it is often no longer translated but is rendered as “in the presence of,” “before,” “in the name of.” I believe, however, in his *Commentary* that Theodore almost always uses the term to express how a “person” as a particular self acts in ways appropriate to his or her hypostatic nature or—as an anonymous referee recommended—as “something like ‘the self-manifestation of an individual.’” This view is prevalent among modern philosophers who reject any consideration of a “person” as having a substance, believing that this cannot be determined as such in any critical, scientific way. They stress that one can get to know a person by what he or she consistently does. This approach presumes that one can sometimes obtain from a person’s constant behavior and speech an accurate understanding of who a “person” is, or at least what kind of “person” this is. In this way, expert psychological profilers amass significant data about an individual that provides a well-founded insight into what kind of “person” may have, for example, committed a certain crime.

In his writings, Theodore understands *prosōpon/parçōpā* as denoting how a “person” acts in accord with his or her nature and can be known as such by what the “person” says and does. For Theodore *prosōpon/parçōpā* is a functional term.<sup>13</sup> In the citation below, he indicates how *hypostasis/genōmā* and *prosōpon/parçōpā* are interrelated as the inner self is to one’s appearance and outward ways of acting. He grants that while one cannot see the Holy Spirit’s *hypostasis* and predetermine how he is

<sup>12</sup> Vosté 360/253; Conti 167b.

<sup>13</sup> See the meanings found in *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, ed. J. Payne Smith (Oxford: Clarendon, 1903).

going to act, one can still at times know the *hypostasis/genōmā* by what the Spirit says and does. Though Theodore does not explicitly use *prosōpon* in the following passage, it is implied in how the Holy Spirit visibly manifests himself to the disciples:

**So while you hear [the Spirit's] voice; that is, you perceive the sound of his coming, yet you cannot know where his *hypostasis* is present, so that you can thereby understand his manner of operating.** . . . Nor can it be known how he will act, for he does everything as he wants. [John], however, explains this well when he states that you nevertheless hear his voice. For when he later descended upon the disciples, he was recognized because of the loud sound they heard, as though he were speaking by means of a violent, raging wind [3:8].<sup>14</sup>

When, therefore, Theodore speaks of the divine and the human hypostatic natures as each having its own *prosōpon*, he means that Christ as a unity can operate separately in human and divine ways. For as we will see below, when Theodore conceives of Christ as acting as a unified individual, he uses concrete titles, such as “our Lord Jesus Christ,” that signify that both natures are acting as one. But when Christ (a title of unity) is speaking in human and divine ways, one must take care to discern in each case whether it is Christ *qua* man or Christ *qua* God who is speaking and working. In the following passage, Theodore speaks of the Father, the Word, and Christ as man as each having his own *prosōpon*. So when Christ as God speaks through the assumed man by way of his divine *prosōpon/parçōpā*, he is thereby confirming the presence of his divine majesty acting through him:

[Our Lord] brought out in a convincing way the divine majesty contained in him [speaking] rightly as God the Word's *parçōpā*. Then, after he refers everything said to the Father, he adds: “Amen, amen I say to you: Whoever believes in me has eternal life” [6:47].<sup>15</sup>

But on those occasions when Christ speaks *qua* God, Theodore notes that Christ will often revert to his human *prosōpon/parçōpā*: “After this, [our Lord] reverts to his human *parçōpā*, in order to show that he possesses authority and power, when he asserts: ‘The Father loves his Son, and shows him everything he does’” [5:42].<sup>16</sup> For Theodore, “Son” here refers to the union of the Word and the assumed man as one Son. Theodore also refers to the *prosōpon* of the Spirit as having an important functional role to play in Jesus' life. For example, he does so at the assumed man's resurrection: “[The

<sup>14</sup> Devreesse 322; Kalantzis 55. For the Syriac, see Vosté 69/48, Conti 32b. The rest of the citation is from the Syriac. The bold font in citations indicates the Greek text. For meanings of *prosōpon*, see *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*.

<sup>15</sup> Vosté 147/104–05; Conti 68a.

<sup>16</sup> Vosté 126/90; Conti 59a. Both translate *parçōpā* as “nature.”

Father] would not have resurrected our Savior by the Spirit, unless he were in some way helping in resurrecting [Jesus]" [17:11].<sup>17</sup> Though Theodore does not use the word "*prosōpon*" in the following citation, he implies it in the way that Christ as man reveals not only his majestic union with the Word and through him with his Father but also both the existence of the Spirit and his prosopic activities within the Trinity and Christ's own earthly life:

**So when [Christ] affirms that "(the Spirit) does not speak on his own," he is not asserting that he is speaking about [the Spirit's] inferiority but about his close harmonious union and accord within the Trinity.** You will also recognize the nature of the Father, the majesty of the Son who is ineffably begotten from him, and [Christ as man] who shares in his substance,<sup>18</sup> seeing as he possesses an exact likeness to [the Son's] nature within God's plan for human beings. You will also become aware of the awesome majesty conferred on him by the One existing in him and the kind of union he enjoys with him. Despite the [vast] immeasurable difference between their natures and his, he was allowed to come into existence through the power of that One who made him [16:13].<sup>19</sup>

Later I consider the Spirit's role within the spiritual life of those united to Christ as the members of his Body.

In summary, Theodore uses *prosōpon/parçōpā* to express in general not only how Christ but also the Father, Son, and Spirit act in their specific natural ways. When he applies the term to Christ, he is differentiating the times when Christ speaks in accord with his divine or human nature and, in so doing, distinguishing it expressly and clearly from *hypostasis/qenōmā*. But while wanting to maintain a sharp difference between Christ's two natures, Theodore was still sensitive to the issue of whether both the divine and human natures could fully act on their own. He realized that he was opening himself to the charge that he was holding for two distinct persons. Theodore confronted this issue at the beginning of his Prologue. He portrays John as determined to write his Gospel because he thought the Synoptics had not unequivocally affirmed Christ's divinity:

**[John] declared that [the other evangelists] ought to have discussed the coming of our Lord in the flesh and not to have passed over mentioning something about his divinity. He feared that with the passage of time, those who were accustomed**

<sup>17</sup> Vosté (314/225); Conti (145b) legitimately translate *parçōpā* as "name." But I think the context reveals that the stress is on the Spirit's role in Christ's resurrection.

<sup>18</sup> I have translated *aytouta* in the present context as the Syriac equivalent of the Greek *ούσία*. It can also be translated as *hypostasis* and "existence."

<sup>19</sup> I have merged the overlapping Greek and Syriac texts as one. The Greek citation can be found in Devreesse 400; Kalantzis 126; and the Syriac in Vosté 294/210; Conti 135b.

to know [Jesus] by their accounts would think that he is, as presented [in their Gospels], merely [human].<sup>20</sup>

Yet the dilemma remains: if Christ's divinity and humanity operate freely according to their separate natures, how can they be said to form a true unity? Theodore tries to resolve this impasse by asserting that the divine and human natures are united by reason of their "one common *prosōpon*."

### Two *Prosōpa* Coinciding in One *Prosōpon*

While Theodore considers *prosōpon* to be a term expressing how a subsisting "person" acts in accord with one's nature and can be known as such by one's consistent behavior, he was aware that he had to reconcile the texts in John's Gospel that had Christ speaking and acting in clearly human ways with texts that had him doing so in clearly divine ways. Theodore could easily do so by employing the concrete titles found in the Evangelists and Paul, such as "Jesus Christ," or simply "Christ" and "our Lord," but he was unable to decide on one "philosophical" term to adequately express the mystery of Christ's substantial unity. He decided to explain the unity of Christ's natures on the level where they act as "one common *prosōpon*." By this phrase, he was opting for a functional unity, presuming, as he does, the existence of an underlying substantial unity, as exemplified by the title "our Lord Jesus Christ." To maintain a true unity of Christ's distinctly natural ways of acting, Theodore concluded that there had to be a common functional center where Christ's human and divine actions flow from one central source. He believed that this is expressed in the Gospel passages where Christ acts in the same context as one, now in a human way, now in a divine way. Theodore explains this when commenting on 8:16, where he introduces the analogy Paul proposes in Romans 7:15–21 by comparing how the human "ego"<sup>21</sup> acts as one in spiritual and bodily ways to how Christ's two *prosōpa* can function as one. He is, therefore, drawing from Paul his understanding of how Christ's "ego" can act as the center, source, and cause of Christ's human and divine acts.

<sup>20</sup> Devreesse 306; Kalantzis 41–42; Vosté 7/3–4; Conti 3a. Close examination of those Greek texts that overlap with the Syriac lead me to believe that the Greek appears to be the more basic text, at least for perhaps the first two-thirds of the work. The generally close correlation between the Greek and Syriac texts suggests their origination from the same manuscript.

<sup>21</sup> I am placing "ego" in quotation marks to indicate that Theodore is not using the term in any Freudian or more modern philosophical sense. Rather, he sees Paul's discussion of how one can act in spiritual and bodily ways as a reflection of his personal experience, whereby one's "ego" is regarded as the center of one's existence and the responsible agent for one's actions.

### Theodore's Understanding of Christ's "Ego" of Unity

Philosophers speculate about the meanings of and the differences between one's "self" and "ego." Theodore, for his part, seems to regard Christ's "ego" as that part of the union where Christ's two *prosōpa* act as one on the personal level where one's rational "self" thinks and wills. This presumes, of course, that one can speak about God in this way. But as the following passage reveals, Theodore is relating how Christ's human "ego" acts in relationship to his common "ego":

When [Paul] was speaking of the two [actions of the soul and the body], he posited each of these acts "to me" as one [functional self]; that is, he is speaking of these two natures and their two actions, which are aptly distinguished in regard to their distinctive natures, as belonging to one *parçōpā* because of the body's bonding to its soul. So also when our Lord was speaking about his humanity and his divinity, Paul posits this "I" as referring to their common *parçōpon* [8:16].<sup>22</sup>

In other words, Theodore is considering Christ's common *prosōpon* to be the functional center of unity in a way analogous to how the human "ego" is not merely the mind and heart of one's unified existence but also the responsible cause of all of one's actions.<sup>23</sup> Theodore does draw the logical conclusion contained in this analogy that if each of the human and divine prosopic activities of Christ flows causally but separately from their common "ego," then it follows that the wills of the Word and the assumed man and all their decisions are allied and are ultimately one in a real but inexplicable way:

**For [the Word] does not do something, and I do something else, because my acts are like his. For what he does, I do the same, thereby having a common activity. For he and I are accomplishing the same deeds. . . . If their undertakings and mode of operation are common, how is it possible that what they will and decide to do are separate?** [5:19]<sup>24</sup>

One cannot, however, progress beyond this conclusion. For how the Word and Christ as man both arrive at a common decision and can work together

<sup>22</sup> Vosté 167–8/119–20; Conti 77b.

<sup>23</sup> One must be careful here to apply this analogy to the one point Theodore is making. He elaborates on this point in his commentary on Philippians 2:7–11: "When [Paul] speaks, therefore, [of those acts] that ought to be assigned to the divine nature, he has joined these together, in the one and same '*persona*,' with those [actions] that properly belong to Christ's humanity." See Theodore, Bishop of Mopsuestia, *The Commentaries on the Minor Epistles of Paul*, trans. Rowan A. Greer (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010) 318–19. I have translated this passage from the Latin. As confirmed by cross-checking the Greek and Latin texts (*ibid.* 182), the Latin term *persona* is a translation of the Greek *prosōpon*.

<sup>24</sup> I translated this passage mainly from the Greek (Devreesse 326; Kalantzis 58; for the Syriac, see Vosté 110/78; Conti 51a–b).

as one and yet in separate divine and human ways is ultimately unfathomable. Theodore seems to have accepted this expression to be all that one can say. It is similar to the problem of how God's efficacious grace can really coincide with human freedom.

### Two Instructive Examples

Because the issue of Christ's "ego" is so crucial for understanding Theodore's thought about the unity of Christ's natures, two passages will, I hope, illuminate his meaning. In the first, Theodore reveals his intent when he explains why Christ *qua* man has a true mediating role to play in granting a request. The fact that his prayer is answered reveals that he is one in likeness with the Father through his union with the Word:

[Christ as man] can grant this, since the Father is known to be entirely in the Son. Therefore, the man's majestic likeness is known by what he has accomplished in him and by how he mediates for all others. For his likeness reveals the glory of the Father who has marvelously generated a nature like his own. In both cases, whether in regard to his divinity or humanity, he employs [the pronoun] "I," so that the meaning of what is being said will be known from the context, with the natures being recognized by the different words [being used]. From the fact that he speaks of himself in both instances as one [subject], he manifests his prosopic union. If this were not rightly so, the assumed one would not possess any honor at all, even though he clearly shares in everything because of the One dwelling within him [14:13].<sup>25</sup>

In the second example, Theodore qualifies and limits how Christ's human *prosōpon* can act as one "ego" with his divine *prosōpon*. Theodore holds that Christ's humanity is sharing as one in his Father's nature in the sense that he is both revealing and participating in the Father's divine majesty. However, while God can use any human being as an extrinsic instrument of divine power, Christ as man possesses his power intrinsically because he participates in the exercise of the Word's and the Father's divine power:

**After [our Lord] states that "We are one, I and the Father," as we are one "ego" in majesty and authoritative power, he immediately adds: "No one can snatch these from either my hand or my Father's hand." [He thus speaks] to indicate that his Father is far greater than everyone. So being like the Father, he is also the Creator of all creation, in that he possesses equal power with him because of their likeness to each other [10:30].**<sup>26</sup>

Lest there be any misunderstanding here, Theodore carefully qualifies this sharing in God's creative power by sharply distinguishing between

<sup>25</sup> Vosté 271/193–94; Conti 124b–25a.

<sup>26</sup> Devreesse 355; Kalantzis 84; for the Syriac, see Vosté 213–14/152; Conti 98a.

the natures of Christ and the Father. This is clearly affirmed in the next citation:

**But how can these [signs] reveal that he is like his Father and that he is the Creator of heaven and earth and of everything that has come to be? This is what he means when he speaks about his divine likeness to his Father. The assumed one [Christ in his humanity], however, cannot be likened to God the Father [as such]. But the miracles performed by the man are seen greatly to surpass the nature of the one who did them. So if I have attributed to him all this power, consider then who it is who exists within him and whether he is not completely like the One who can accomplish through his own natural power everything that he wants and as he wants.<sup>27</sup>**

In other words, because Christ as man can be said to be truly one with the Father in the exercise of his majestic divine power, he is revealing that he possesses an exact likeness in this regard with the Father, even to the point that Christ as man can be said to be the Creator of the universe, because at creation he shares in God's power through his union with the Word.

### The Meaning of Christ's Likeness to the Father

To understand how Theodore sees Christ's human nature as like his Father's, one needs first to be aware of the special nuance that he assigns to the Greek word *megethos* (in Syriac, *rabutha*) throughout his *Commentary on John*. The word basically means "greatness" and, as translated by Conti, "dignity." But in the *Commentary*, the contexts invariably suggest that whenever *megethos* is referred to Christ's humanity, it is best interpreted as expressing the fact that Christ's humanity is not merely revealing the "greatness" or the "majesty" of God but also intimately participating in God's own majestic nature. Theodore's meaning can be further gleaned from his application of Hebrews 1:3 to how the Word relates to the Father: "For 'splendor' is [what emanates] from the nature of the sun or fire and exists because of it, without being separated from the nature of its source by reason of time" [1:1].<sup>28</sup> In a similar way, Christ's humanity radiates not only the majestic nature of the divinity but also participates in it in a unique inseparable way. In other words, to recognize the majestic power that Christ *qua* man possesses in answering positively to prayers is to recognize the divine power that he shares as one with the Word hidden in him.

Theodore further clarifies how he believes Christ as man and the Father can be said to be exactly alike in nature. When commenting on

<sup>27</sup> Devreesse 390; Kalantzis 116; for the Syriac, see Vosté 270/193; Conti 124a–b.

<sup>28</sup> Vosté 23–24/16; Conti 11b.

John 14:10, “Do you not believe I am in my Father, and my Father is in me,” Theodore observes:

**This equal reciprocity<sup>29</sup> [between Christ as man and the Father] has been made especially clear by everything asserted here.<sup>30</sup> For by centering his conversation equally upon himself and his Father, he has revealed their “exact” likeness in nature. For he is present in the Father, and the Father in him, with their likeness enabling each to be truly revealed in the other. He then furnishes proof of his statement: “I do not speak the words that I speak on my own.” If you do not believe, know that we have a complete union in nature, knowledge, will, and power and that our words are not to be distinguished. For whenever I speak, our words are common, so that I should not be regarded as speaking solely on my own.<sup>31</sup>**

Theodore did not use the terms “ego” or “one common *prosōpon*” in this passage, but he is equivalently saying that when Christ as man speaks, his words, human though they be, are also the Word’s, for they are wholly united in purpose and will. This union and unity indicate that whenever Christ as man speaks, it is never simply as man but as man united with the Word.

Theodore stresses the true common likeness that Christ as man has with the Father; in his commentary on John 10:36 he qualifies his understanding of it:

**“We are one, my Father and I.” Here [Christ] is revealing by this juxtaposition that their nature is the same,<sup>32</sup> indicating that it is not blasphemous for a man to be endowed with the name of God. There is, however, a huge incomparable difference between the latter and the former. Likewise when he said: “We are one, the Father and I,” he added correctly: “I am God’s Son,” so that no one would presume that he, like the Father, is uncaused. He is thus showing that although he says he is God and one with the Father, yet he does not mean that he exists with the unbegotten One as though he too has no beginning, but rather that he is like the Son in relationship to his Father. For [the Son] has been generated from him and has an exact likeness [with him] by his having been generated from him [10:36].<sup>33</sup>**

One final point. When Theodore speaks about how Christ as man is like the Father, he understands this to be due to his “exact” union with the Word: “For just as I have such a close, uninterrupted relationship with my Father that I can never from this moment be separated from him, seeing as I am his Son through my union with God the Word, I am now acknowledging him as my Father, without renouncing my intimate relationship with [the

<sup>29</sup> The Syriac translates this phrase by “likeness.”

<sup>30</sup> The alternate Greek reading is: “He very clearly teaches their exact likeness by the way he speaks of the reciprocal way that he is in the Father, and the Father in him, with each being able to be seen in the other.”

<sup>31</sup> The translation is mainly based on the Greek text (Devreesse 390; Kalantzis 116), with a few Syriac clarifications (Vosté 269/192; Conti 123b–24a).

<sup>32</sup> This clause is not present in the Syriac.

<sup>33</sup> I base this translation mainly on the Greek text (Devreesse 356–57; Kalantzis 85); see also Vosté 217/154; Conti 99b.

Word].”<sup>34</sup> Yet this does not mean that Christ as man knows everything that the Father knows. Rather he knows through his relationship with the Word what the Father is revealing to him. Theodore sees this relationship expressed in John 5:20:

**The Father loves the Son and reveals to him everything** he does and reveals to him even greater works than these, so much so that it will amaze you. **This, however, has to be interpreted thus:** that what has been asserted above is clearly not being precisely [affirmed] in a literal way, and so this [having everything revealed to him] is not relevant, as it applies [totally] to his divinity.<sup>35</sup>

### Theodore’s Application of His Understanding of Terms to Particular Texts

To further grasp Theodore understanding of how Christ’s two *prosōpa* act as one common *prosōpon*, it will be helpful to observe how Theodore applies this coactivity and unity in three passages of his *Commentary*. This will both exemplify and confirm what he means by asserting that divine and human *prosōpa* coincide in one common *prosōpon*. In the first passage, he is convinced that by distinguishing between Christ’s human and divine activities, he can clearly explain why the Lord Jesus Christ (as the subject of unity) can justifiably heal a paralytic on the Sabbath and not be violating the Jewish Law proscribing work on this day (5:9–10). Theodore argues that Christ heals the paralytic not simply *qua* man but *qua* God working with and through Christ as man. He has this right and power to heal *qua* man because, as seen above, God the Word dwells within him in a true unity and allows him to make use of the Word’s power:

**Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, being God and man, shows by the trustworthy word of God that the Jews could charge him appropriately *qua* man for having violated the Sabbath. But he [really] did not do so. For everything he wants to do [as man] is allowed him, because all that belongs to God [the Word] by reason of his nature has been bestowed also on him as “man” because of his union with [the Word]. He is, therefore, speaking here by way of the majestic nature present in him, in order to take the occasion, when the Jews censured him, to reveal, as far as one can, what is his other nature. For this reason, he changed over in an orderly way from [his divine way of acting and speaking] to his human way, for what he has said is very much contrary to his visible [nature].**<sup>36</sup>

In other words, when the Jews claimed that Christ was breaking the Law, Christ responded that he did not have the power to do so solely *qua* man. Rather it is God in his role as the Legislator of the Law who has brought about the cure. So when he cures on the Sabbath, it is due to the divine

<sup>34</sup> Vosté 204/145; Conti 93.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Devreesse 326; Kalantzis 58; see also Vosté 112–3/80; Conti 52b.

power that belongs to him because of his union with God the Word, which he is free to invoke, if he so chooses. Although Theodore does not speak here of our Lord as acting in terms of his human and divine prosopic activities, he was able to cure the paralytic not because he was doing so by reason of his human *parçōpā*, but because the Word's *parçōpā* was acting with and through him. Theodore insists that the cure also had a deeper purpose than to draw the crowd's attention to Christ as a human being. Theodore believes the principal reason was to lead those witnessing this miraculous healing to recognize the divine nature active in and through Christ:

The context shows that he said this to reveal that his human nature by itself can do nothing by its own power apart from its union with God the Word. . . . This gave him the opportunity to respond . . . in a convincing way that he has thereby truly confirmed the majestic divine element (*rabuṭha*) contained in what he said when he spoke out in a transcendent way as the *parçōpā* of God the Word [5:22].<sup>37</sup>

Another example where Theodore interprets a passage in light of his view that Christ's two *prosōpa* operate as one *prosōpon* is the apparent contradiction in John 8:16 where Christ says, "I do not judge," and then, "When I do, my judgment is true." Theodore explains the difference thus:

Then to make us aware by this that he is not making these statements according to the same nature, he distinguishes between which nature is saying "I do not judge" and "when I judge." . . . Likewise [the statement] "the Father does not judge anyone, but has given the entire judgment to his Son" [5:22] ought to be understood in the same way. For he is reasserting here that you should [not]<sup>38</sup> doubt that what he says is being stated in accordance with his human nature. So too you should regard "I do not judge anyone" as being said in regard to his divinity. For [the Father] will judge everyone but will carry out the actual judgment on those to be judged by the visible one. And the judgment he will make will be true and just. For seeing as he fully shares [God's] majesty, he is rightly judging everyone. Therefore, he is not alone and does not judge here by himself. For in no way would we accept that he has the power to accomplish such deeds as these because of his inferior nature. . . . So if someone comes across this verse where he says: "My Father does not judge anyone, but has entrusted the whole judgment to the Son," he or she will discover a great equality existing between the latter and the former as regards its meaning. For Christ is demonstrating here his majesty by the fact that "he judges," so that no one would doubt about what he has said. But there is Another causing what he is doing.<sup>39</sup>

Once again Theodore does not speak here in terms of Christ's two prosopic natures. But he insists that Christ can speak as one in both human and divine ways, thereby exemplifying these activities of Christ's human and divine natures and their unity in one common *prosōpon*. For Theodore, therefore,

<sup>37</sup> Vosté 121/86; Conti 56b. Conti does not translate *parçōpā*. For the context, see Conti 55b.

<sup>38</sup> This is the alternate reading proposed in a footnote.

<sup>39</sup> Vosté 167–9/119–20; Conti 77b–78a.

the Father, the Word, and Christ as the assumed man all judge as one but in different ways. The Father is the ultimate judge. The Word also judges with the Father because the Word too shares the same divine nature and operation as the Father. Christ the assumed man is also empowered to judge in a visible way because of his prosopic union with the Word and the Father.

In the third example, it is important to note that when Theodore affirms that Christ can speak and act in dual ways, Theodore is careful to state that when Christ speaks and acts as man or as the Word, such individual acts ought not to be interpreted as applicable to both at the same time:

So, as I have said, “I have come forth from the Father” can be understood as referring to his divinity, but it ought not to be interpreted as though he [as man] were separated from [the Father]. It is also clear that [the other statement] cannot be taken as referring to the assumed man. For “I leave and go away” cannot be asserted of the divinity, in the sense of there being a [real] departure or a union. Such a view is wholly unacceptable! Yet it can be said of the [assumed] man. So both [statements] cannot be taken as being able to be applicable at the same time to only one of these natures. For neither [statement] can be attributed [as such] to God the Word and to the man. So according to this interpretation that we have just affirmed—which no one can offer a clearer one that better coheres with this context—the first is seen as being applied to the divinity, the second to the assumed man. But since both natures have become truly united as one, [Christ] is equivalently saying: “I [the Word] am in a man and am considered to be [only] a man by those who do not know me. I have done everything through him for the salvation of human beings. For I have assumed him in order to unite him to the Father through Me” [16:28].<sup>40</sup>

### Christ’s Human Freedom

Theodore recognized the need for Christ’s human and divine *prosōpa* to act in tandem but at times not simultaneously in the same act because he wants, doubtless among other reasons, to preserve Christ’s human freedom. While Theodore holds that there is a union of Christ’s divine and human prosopic wills on a fundamental level where God’s will is unquestionably absolute and in no way dependent on any consent of Christ’s human will, he maintains that there exists in an unexplainable way one “ego” for both the human and divine natures, such that each nature can function together with the other in a free natural way in their co-union. Two passages highlight Christ’s human freedom. In the first, Christ *qua* man is said not only to realize what his Father wants, but also to be freely seeking to do it:

Afterward [our Lord] reverts to his human *parçōpā* to show thereby that he possesses [God’s] authority and power, by saying: “The Father loves his Son, and is revealing to him everything that he will do.” . . . He corroborates this [by speaking]

<sup>40</sup> Vosté 303–04/217; Conti 140b.

as God. Then after alluding to his majestic dignity, he reverts at once to his human *parçōpā*, to show thereby that he is permitted to do what he wants [5:42].<sup>41</sup>

This human freedom is clearly affirmed also by Christ's free acceptance on his own terms of his unwarranted death: “**After my passion** and the cross, **I must cease and set aside my entire earthly way of living** and my association with other humans. . . . But until that time comes, you [my enemies] can in no way attain what you are seeking. For when all my works have been completed, I will then freely accept my passion” [9:4].<sup>42</sup>

But just as Theodore is careful to preserve the true freedom of Christ's humanity in his union with the Word, he is also resolved fully to protect the integrity of the Word's divine nature and activity. Theodore brings this out when he insists that when Christ as man dies, neither the life nor the freedom of the Word is in any way affected, even though the Word and the assumed man are united as truly one reality:

**So just as Peter, *qua* man, spoke about [giving up] his soul and body, so also Christ, being one and not two in what regards his divinity and his humanity, states that he will give up his soul, the coreality [with his body] of himself as man, even though he was also God because of the nature of the One who assumed his flesh and united to himself the soul he possessed [10:18].**<sup>43</sup>

The sense is that Christ's dying bodily as man does not affect the indwelling Word.

To summarize this section: Theodore has tried to balance the full integrity of each of Christ's two natures with the fact that they are united and operate together under the guidance of their one “ego” or their common *prosōpon*. Admittedly he does not explain in any convincing or satisfactory way how this is also a substantial unity. His main argument seems to be that what the New Testament texts require is this: that Christ acts as a true unity in both human and divine ways. This argument enables Theodore to make sense of the New Testament passages where Christ can be said to have suffered and died, and that only the Word descended from heaven. As regards the unity of Christ as God and as man, Theodore centers his argument in the ways that Christ *qua* man reveals and shares in the Word's majesty and power in ways that are truly like his Father's, to such an extent that Christ and God can be said to be exactly alike. This identification is unmistakably manifested in the real, tangible way that worship is offered to Christ the man as God:

**The time draws near for me as the Son of Man to be glorified and worshipped as God by all creation, even though I became human under the appearance of a man.**

<sup>41</sup> Vosté 127/90; Conti 59a.

<sup>42</sup> My translation blends the Greek (Devreesse 339; Kalantzis 69) with the Syriac (Vosté 186/133; Conti 85b).

<sup>43</sup> I have translated this passage from the Greek (Devreesse 354; Kalantzis 83); see also Vosté 209/149; Conti 96a–b.

**But I did so in an immutable way** that surpasses my [human nature]. For as I have shown in other places, the title “Son of Man” refers to [Christ’s] humanity. For up to the moment that he was crucified, he bore the whole human condition. But then after his resurrection and ascent into heaven, he is adored by all creation because of his union with God the Word [12:23].<sup>44</sup>

Theodore is more specific in the following:

**Then reveal me as I am to [my disciples]. How? By making known to them** that the glory and the **invisible divine nature that I possess before the world came into existence. For it is through this that my glory is being revealed.** For the assumed man’s majesty reveals that, because we believe that God dwells in him, we can also worship him. Otherwise who would be so foolish to adore a man solely for himself [17:5]?<sup>45</sup>

### THE SALVIFIC ROLES OF CHRIST’S HUMANITY

Besides explaining in his *Commentary on John* how he believes Christ’s humanity is related to the divine nature of the Word, Theodore also discusses at length the essential and necessary mediating roles that Christ’s humanity plays in uniting all creatures to God and to one another. Theodore does not explicitly consider here how Christ as man serves as the unique bond for the whole universe.<sup>46</sup> But he does treat at length how Christ *qua* man relates to and interacts with God’s Spirit and other humans as members of his Body, and what roles the Spirit and Christ as man play in the reception of baptism and the Eucharist. For God has chosen Christ’s humanity as a way not merely to make known his invisible divine nature through a visible manifestation that perfectly mirrors who he is as a God of love and truth, but also to serve as the unique mediator who provides, together with the Spirit, a way for others to know the true God as a Father and enter into a real but indirect family relationship with his adopted children.

#### The Role of the Spirit

To advance my argument, I first need to establish the critical role that the Holy Spirit plays in the earthly life of Christ *qua* man and, together with him, within God’s plan for universal salvation. The Spirit’s initial mediating role is to enable Christ as man to be truly united to the Word: “For [Christ

<sup>44</sup> This is a melding of the Greek (Devreesse 381; Kalantzis 99) and Syriac texts (Vosté 240/171 and Conti 110a–b).

<sup>45</sup> The first three lines are from the Greek text (Devreesse 404; Kalantzis 130); the rest are from the Syriac (Vosté 310/222; Conti 143b).

<sup>46</sup> For a fuller treatment of this theme, see Frederick McLeod, S.J., *The Roles of Christ’s Humanity in Salvation: Insights from Theodore of Mopsuestia* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 2005) 102–23.

as man] participates in a true sonship because of his Spirit-mediating union with God the Word" [1:16].<sup>47</sup> The Spirit also enables Christ as man to be the dispenser of grace to others. In the same citation, Theodore regards Jesus' humanity as having received the fullness of all grace at his baptism in the Jordan River:

"Of his fullness we have all received"; that is, the grace we are receiving from the Spirit is coming from his abundant goodness. [John] is asserting in this way that all grace resides in [Christ's] humanity, as well as also revealing the majestic nature<sup>48</sup> that exists within him. . . . We share in this because of the grace of the Spirit and our participation in [Christ's Body], that enables us to be [God's] adopted children, even though we are far from being on the same level as that of [Christ's] majesty.<sup>49</sup>

Theodore expands upon how Christ's sonship as man vastly differs from all others when he comments on: "I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God" [20:17]:

No one is so foolish that he or she would assert that [the words] "to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" are referring to anyone else but to God the Word's temple, the man who has been assumed for our salvation and who has both died and risen and is about to ascend into heaven. [Christ] is saying, therefore, that God is a father for his disciples, because he made them worthy of filial adoption through the graces he has bestowed on them. . . . Therefore, because he shares in their nature, **he says as man: "My God and your God," on the basis of the flesh that he shares in common with [every] human being.** He is, however, distinguishing his *parçōpā* here from theirs, to indicate thereby the all-surpassing grace he has received. For he is honored by all as the true Son by reason of his union with God the Word. **He thus differs [from them] by his nature as God, indicating in this way the difference existing between the Creator and his creatures.**<sup>50</sup>

### Christ's Mediating Roles in Baptism and the Eucharist

The spiritual birth that enables an individual to share Christ's life and death and become a vital member of his Body first occurs at one's reception of baptism. This newly acquired life is then to be nurtured and deepened throughout one's life by means of the Eucharist.<sup>51</sup> Theodore explains these sacraments as being types<sup>52</sup> that enable their participants to really

<sup>47</sup> Vosté 38/26; Conti 18a.

<sup>48</sup> See above, n. 14.

<sup>49</sup> See above, n. 49.

<sup>50</sup> This translation blends the Greek (Devreesse 416; Kalantzis 143) and Syriac texts (Vosté 350/251; Conti 162a–b).

<sup>51</sup> For a more in-depth treatment of Theodore's understanding of baptism and the Eucharist, see Frederick McLeod, "The Theological Ramifications of Theodore of Mopsuestia's Understanding of Baptism and the Eucharist," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10 (2002) 41–50.

<sup>52</sup> For a fuller treatment, see McLeod, *Roles of Christ's Humanity in Salvation* 47–52.

share in some measured but real way in the resurrection of Jesus as the Christ and in the life that Christ as man shares with the divine nature. The life that baptism instills and that the Eucharist fosters is real but inchoate. Although the fullness of this life has not yet been achieved, it possesses a real, active potential that is guaranteed, in an eschatological sense, to be attained at one's resurrection, provided one lives faithfully and lovingly in accord with his or her new life in Christ. Since a baptized person can freely reject and lose this new life at any time during his or her earthly sojourn, Theodore urges every believer to keep unblemished one's gift of being God's child by living a virtuous, loving life:

Rather it is by what the Spirit's power accomplishes when he regenerates us in the hope of [attaining] the resurrection of which baptism is a type and which our death cannot void. In addition to this, he has prepared the delights of the heavenly kingdom for us, provided we keep unblemished by living a virtuous life the honor of being [God's] adopted children that baptism has conferred on us [1:14].<sup>53</sup>

Those united to Christ's humanity are also united to one another, just as the members of a body are bound to its head. The New Testament calls this "bodily" union with Christ to be the church of God. It also implies an essential element of being a "person"—that one cannot be a "person" except in relationship to others.<sup>54</sup> One is not simply an individual but an individual with a fundamental need to be part of a community. This need is exemplified in the mysterious way that the Father, Son, and Spirit are "Persons," each sharing in his own communal way in their same divine nature. So also is Christ *qua* man related in a communal way both to all humans who share the same human nature and to all who are baptized as living members of his Body, the church, and, in a unique way, to the Word and his Father. Since Christ's humanity is united relationally to the Word's divine nature, it follows existentially that those who are "bodily" united to Christ's humanity are also personally in a mediate way related to the Word:

Just as those who are born into this life comprise one human "being"<sup>55</sup> as regards their nature, so also those born after their dying and resurrection into another world are one "being" in a [spiritual] nature. . . . **For it is through our baptism into the death and the resurrection of Christ that we all become the one Body of Christ, with Christ as our head, whereby, being thus bonded to Christ, we are united to his Father** [17:21].<sup>56</sup>

In other words, Theodore believes that there exists some sort of a quasi-organic unity or at least something more than a moral union between

<sup>53</sup> Vosté 35/24; Conti 17a.

<sup>54</sup> The essential element of a "person" suggests that *prosōpon* also connotes a relationship to others.

<sup>55</sup> Conti translates the Syriac phrase as "one whole."

<sup>56</sup> The first section is from the Syriac (Vosté 319–20/229; Conti 148a); the second is from the Greek (Devreesse 407; Kalantzis 133).

Christ as man and the Word and between them and the baptized. The grace of the Spirit enables the baptized to enter, by means of Christ's humanity, into the household of God as his adopted children and to say to God, "Abba, Father":

Then [our Lord] said: "Holy Father, keep in your name those whom you have given me, in order that they may be one, just as we are." For just as you have united me to God the Word<sup>57</sup> through the Spirit's mediation and made me worthy of your sonship, so am I able to call upon you as my Father. Therefore, when I confer the grace of the Spirit upon these, make them your children, so that they may also be one "being," as I am, and may they have the same union with you and be able to call you confidently "Father." **For this is what "being in your name" means** [17:11].<sup>58</sup>

Theodore vaguely states what this "one being" is, but it implies a real unity where various members are truly interrelated with one another spiritually in a real, communal family, existence.

Theodore is ever insistent that becoming a child of God and a member of the Body of Christ through baptism and the nourishment of this life through the Eucharist are not wholly sufficient of themselves. One must also freely live out one's life in Christ in a loving, virtuous way. For since God has revealed himself as a God of love, he must allow others the opportunity and freedom to receive his love and to commit themselves to him, as Christ *qua* man always did throughout his earthly life. Theodore maintains that God, in his plan of salvation, requires by the nature of love that all humans, including Christ *qua* man, must freely commit themselves to live out their lives in a love faithful to God's will, if they are to truly continue in their filial relationship to God. In the next citation, Theodore insists that while God will not stand in the way of all seeking to attain the heavenly blessing promised after death, one can freely choose not to follow the path Christ as man has journeyed:

Our Lord, however, in order to explain his remarks, said: "Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come, I and my Father, and make our dwelling with him." For I have already proclaimed that **I will not deny to anyone who** is acting virtuously **[the attainment] of these blessings**. For whoever wants to achieve these has the right to joyfully share in my future blessings. So, therefore, whoever loves me and keeps all my commandments will not only not be deprived of seeing me revealing myself but will also enjoy [the Father's and my] love [14:23].<sup>59</sup>

In other words, the baptized receive the life of God in a typical way that is truly real but in a potential sense; its fulfillment is guaranteed in the future,

<sup>57</sup> The Syriac text has the word "Father" here; this does not make sense in the context.

<sup>58</sup> Vosté 316/226; Conti 146a. The last line is from Devreesse 406; Kalantzis 132.

<sup>59</sup> This translation combines the Greek (Devreesse 394; Kalantzis 120) with the Syriac (Vosté 275–76/197; Conti 127a).

provided one remains faithful by responding in a loving, virtuous way to God's love.

To sum up, a brief comparison and contrast with Cyril of Alexandria's Christology may be helpful to highlight what is distinctive in Theodore's Christology. Cyril too considers the title "Christ" to be representing the union of the Word with Jesus' humanity: "It is because of [the Word's] likeness to us that he is called the Christ . . . that is, insofar as he is common to us."<sup>60</sup> Cyril, however, so stresses the unity of Christ's natures that he concedes only a conceptual distinction between them: "[Christ] is thus indivisible after the union and is not separated into two persons (*prosōpa*), even though we conceive of the Word of God as being other than the flesh in which he dwelt."<sup>61</sup> Cyril envisages this unity so strictly that he appears to be insisting on the presence of only one divine operation in Christ: "[Christ] took the hand [of the ruler's daughter] and, as it is written, he gave her life as God by means of his all-powerful command and the touch of his holy flesh. He shows that there was one kindred operation on the part of both. . . . For in an ineffable way that surpasses human understanding, the Word has united himself to his flesh and transformed it so entirely to himself that his operative power gives life to what lacks life" (1.532).<sup>62</sup> Knowing Cyril's insistence on such a strict unity helps one appreciate his conception of a hypostatic union, but it raises serious questions as to what and how much Christ as man knows and to what extent he could freely act as man.

Theodore, on the other hand, influenced by John's explicit statements, saw the need to explain how the Word and Jesus, while one, operated at times in either strictly divine or strictly human ways. This, of course, opened Theodore to the charge that he ultimately held for two distinct individuals, despite his insistence to the contrary. I have here presented passages that show he believed he could solve the dilemma of maintaining a true personal unity in Christ while preserving the full integrity of Christ's two natures, by explaining the integrity as the coexistence of two *prosōpa* in one common *prosōpon*. Theodore was convinced that his approach is justified by the sense it makes of those passages where Christ speaks and acts in clear-cut divine and human ways.

Theodore makes another contribution. While Cyril understands the Word *qua* man to be immediately operating in Christ's human actions, Theodore

<sup>60</sup> This reference is to Cyril's *Commentary on John's Gospel* (PG 69:1.576), <http://ancientworldonline.blogspot.com/2009/10/migne-online.html> (from the Library of Ruslan Khazarzar).

<sup>61</sup> PG 69:1.577.

<sup>62</sup> PG 69:1.530. For a summary discussion of whether Cyril considered Christ's body as an instrument and held for only one operation in Christ, see Lois M. Farag, *St. Cyril of Alexandria, a New Testament Exegete: His Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias, 2007) 121–28.

holds that, while Christ's "ego" or common *prosōpon* is the ultimate source and cause of all his actions, the "ego" must work with, in, and through each of his natures as the proximate cause of a particular act. In other words, each nature has an essential role to play that has to be acknowledged, such as Christ as God or as man acted thus. This permitted him to be able to treat how Jesus could grow in age and wisdom and freely decide as he wanted.

### CONCLUSION

What Theodore of Mopsuestia meant by Christ's having two *hypostaseis* and two *prosōpa* coinciding in one *prosōpon* I have sought to explain in light of his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*. I contend that the passages presented here can be interpreted in an orthodox sense. What may complicate such an evaluation is that Theodore's writings and person have been solemnly condemned. So, while the question raised here ought to be judged on its own merits, some comments about this condemnation are in order, for it is not as clear-cut as it may seem. First, the Fathers at Constantinople II, under constant prodding by Emperor Justinian (483–565), quickly condemned Theodore, Theodoret's anti-Cyrrillan writings, and the so-called "letter of Ibas," bishop of Edessa. However, the Fathers listened to only 71 excerpts from Theodore's writings, and with angry outbursts, as the *Acta* note,<sup>63</sup> demanded that his heretical impiety be condemned. But no attempt was made to situate and understand the extracts in their proper contexts. Nor was anyone allowed to defend Theodore. When the Fathers later sought the approval of Pope Vigilius, who attended none of the council sessions, he refused to anathematize Theodore as to his person; but under intense pressure from Justinian, he finally agreed to anathematize both Theodore's person and his writings.<sup>64</sup> Vigilius was then allowed to return to Rome but died in Sicily on his way. When the council proceedings reached the West, two large dioceses, North Africa and Aquileia, broke away in schism, not in defense of Theodore, but convinced that the council had rejected the Council of Chalcedon (451). In the East, the council failed to reconcile the Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians and opened up the Eastern Church to a new festering dogmatic crisis, that of Monotheletism, the view that Christ had only one will, while deliberately leaving vague whether Christ as man had a truly operating free will in the union or whether there existed only one will in the

<sup>63</sup> *Concilium universale Constantinopolitanum sub Justiniano habitum*, ed. Johannes Straub, *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* 4.1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1971) 56.

<sup>64</sup> For a summary of these events, see Alois Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 2, *From the Council of Chalcedon (451) to Gregory the Great (590–604)*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. Pauline Allen and John Cawte (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975) 440–42; and McLeod, *Roles of Christ's Humanity* 205–25.

union, that of the divine. It was not until the Third Council of Constantinople (680–681) that this dispute was resolved among the Greeks and the Latins, when it proclaimed that there were two faculties and two wills in Christ, a decree that Theodore would have accepted as a personal vindication.<sup>65</sup>

While the process that Justinian pushed through can be rightly criticized, this does not mean that the Council Fathers were wrong in their condemnation of Theodore. It seems evident that they considered *prosōpon* and *hypostasis* to be synonyms, doubtless in the Cyrillian sense that they are integral elements of a single reality, explaining why they felt the need to reinterpret Chalcedon's dogmatic conclusion that "what is peculiar to both natures is preserved *and* coincides in one *prosōpon* and one *hypostasis*" to actually mean "one *prosōpon* or one *hypostasis*."<sup>66</sup> They did so to allay the fears of the non-Chalcedonians that the Fathers at Chalcedon favored the Nestorian view of Christ's union and unity.

All this raises the question as to what the Fathers at Chalcedon intended to convey about Theodore. It is true that they did not officially condemn Theodore and his writings, but one can infer a positive reason for their reticence. One would expect that if the Fathers rejected Theodore's thought, they would have condemned his person along with Nestorius, particularly in light of Cyril's rejection of Theodore and his work in *Against Diodore and Theodore* (336).<sup>67</sup> Why were the Fathers silent, and why did they permit Bishop Ibas to have his letter warmly praising Theodore read at a council session without any recorded objection? And above all why did they also introduce what appears to be the Antiochene, if not Theodore's, language of "one *prosōpon*" as a major element in their dogmatic statement, unless they saw the need to explicitly affirm the functional, as well as the substantial, unity of Christ's natures? In other words, why did they not simply state "one *hypostasis*," if they believed that *prosōpon* and *hypostasis* were simply synonymous? Rather, the Fathers seem to be asserting that the Antiochene functional emphasis, which was basically Theodore's way of expressing the unity, ought to be complemented with an explicit reference to the substantial *hypostasis* underlying it. Or to put all this in a different way, did the Fathers recognize the need to express the unity of Christ's two natures as the church had done up to that time by insisting that the Synoptics' primary emphasis on a functional approach to Christology needs to include and be balanced with John's stress on the divinity? As regards to why they did not express

<sup>65</sup> See Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1, *Nicaea to Lateran V* (Washington: Georgetown University, 1990) 86.

<sup>66</sup> *Enchiridion symbolorum* no. 302.

<sup>67</sup> This work has survived only in excerpts; it is available in John Behr, *The Case against Diodore and Theodore* (New York: Oxford, 2011) 169–219, 266–71 (Diodore); 252–66, 432–95 (Theodore).

what they recognized to be positive in the Antiochene approach, they would have wanted not to alienate those who regarded Theodore and his teaching as the primary source of Nestorianism. This would also explain why those strongly opposed to Chalcedon, even after the condemnation of Nestorius, were so passionate in their conviction that Chalcedon was promoting Theodore's heretical christological teaching. This also explains why Theodore was condemned 125 years after his death. Origen too was condemned after his death, but his thought was still influential. Not so with Theodore: his personal following in the Byzantine Empire was minimal at that time; his writings were preserved and prized only among the East Syrians outside the empire. This suggests that the non-Chalcedonians were opposed not so much to Theodore as to the council itself because of what they considered to be Theodore's ideas being advanced there. To counter this charge and reunite the two factions, Emperor Justinian was absolute in his demand that Theodore's works *and* person be condemned at the Council of Constantinople.

A more in-depth study needs to be undertaken as to whether Theodore's teaching also influenced the final dogmatic statement at Chalcedon, in addition to Leo's Tome and the Pact of Reunion in 433, but this question is really separate from my concern here—to evaluate Theodore's Christology in his *Commentary on John*. Admittedly it is not easy to argue compellingly that Theodore's approach is fully orthodox, as it promotes a basic functional unity in Christ rather than a substantial one. This study also labors, by its nature, under the inherent weakness of the critical historical method that can never rise above probability (though at times it can rise to very strong probability). For there is always the possibility that other factors are being overlooked or not adequately considered. Despite these reservations, however, the fundamental question arising out of my study is this: Does the Christology of Theodore's *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, despite his official condemnation, offer sufficient grounds for interpreting him in an orthodox sense?