40/40: Thank you, Mitchell, for your midterm essay. It's excellent.

Midterm Exam

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Systematic Theology 305

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I. Explain the Incarnation using these concepts and texts. Which of these concepts helps your understanding of John 1:14?

The Incarnation is a doctrine describing "the becoming of flesh of the divine Logos in Jesus Christ."[1] Heine states, "it was the Logos whom the apologists thought visited and spoke to various people in the Old Testament. God himself did not speak with humans or appear to them. This aspect of the work of the Logos reached its climax in the Incarnation, when the Logos took flesh in the Virgin, was born, and lived among us."[2] In other words, the Incarnation is not the creation of a new being, but rather is the eternal Word assuming human nature without ceasing to be divine.

The concept of the "only-begotten Son" shows that the Logos, who "was with God and was God," is both co-eternal and co-equal with God. It is how God's "only-begotten Son" took on human flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, whereby the Logos embodied both the natures of divinity and humanity. Article II of the Nicene Creed states, "Jesus Christ is God's only Son, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages."[2] When referencing that Jesus is the only begotten Son, it states that he is co-eternal and co-equal with the Father. This phrase articulates the church's belief that Jesus was uniquely generated from the Father, not that he was created, but rather eternally begotten. This concept of the "only-begotten son" being co-eternal and co-equal is referenced in the Gospel of John 1:1-3, where the author writes that "in the beginning was the Word… and the Word was God."[3] In addition to not creating a new being, there is also a self-emptying or kenosis of the eternal Son, who assumed human nature without ceasing to be divine as seen in John 1:14. When the author of John 1:14 writes that "the Word

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[1] Van A. Harvey, *A Handbook of Theological Terms* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), [130]
[2] Ronald E. Heine, *Classical Christian Doctrine: Introducing the Essentials of the Ancient Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), [43].
[3] *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition* (National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., 2021).

became flesh," it is not referring to a creature, but rather to the eternal Son of God entering human existence.[3] This concept clarifies that the Incarnation is the self-expression of God's own being, not an act of creation or adoption.

The concept of kenosis, a term that deepens the understanding of how the eternal Son became human, is also crucial in understanding the Incarnation. As stated previously, kenosis refers to a self-emptying. This is seen in Philippians 2:7 where the author writes about Jesus "emptying himself…assuming human likeness and being found in appearance as a human."[3] In this view, the divine Logos is said to have laid aside or "emptied himself," of his divine attributes, specifically of his "omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence, and assumed all the limitations of human existence."[4] Moltmann describes kenosis as a process that includes the Holy Spirit "emptying itself… and taking up its indwelling in this vulnerable and mortal human being Jesus."[5] In relation to understanding the concept of the Incarnation, the term kenosis discusses the mystery of how the only-begotten Son of God emptied himself of divine privilege to take on the nature of humanity fully. The act of "emptying" does not mean that Christ stopped being divine, but instead points to a voluntary self-limitation. As pointed out by Moltmann, Jesus similarly left "eternity with God" and took on the form of humanity.[5] This limitation was Christ humbling accepting the weaknesses of being human, suffering, and dependence. Through this self-emptying, God enters our experiences so completely that God's divine glory is revealed as a servant. According to John 1:14, kenosis shows that "the Word became flesh" by divine self-giving love, not by abandoning divinity.

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[4] Van A. Harvey, *A Handbook of Theological Terms* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), [138]
[5] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), [93]

Anhypostasis is another concept associated with the Incarnation that is integral to its understanding. John 1:14 states that "the Word became flesh," which signifies a reality often defined by the doctrine of anhypostasis. This doctrine teaches that the human nature of Jesus has no independent personal existence apart from the divine Logos; instead, it is personalized in him. It teaches that Christ's human nature has no independent personal existence apart from the Logos; it is personalized in him. The term anhypostasis is a way some theologians explain the humanity of Christ. It is "a technical term denoting the Christological theory which claims that the divine Logos assume human nature in general but was not incarnate in a real, concrete, individual man."[6] When theologians apply this to Jesus, it means that the human nature of Christ does not exist as a separate or independent "person" that is apart from the Logos. There is no independent personhood. However, it finds its existence and personal identity through its union with the eternal divine person of the Son. This doctrine provides an understanding of the Incarnation as God as the Son becoming human, assuming human nature without becoming another person, so in Jesus, divinity and humanity are united, "without confusion, without change, without division, without separation" as referenced in the Chalcedonian definition.[2]

Connected to anhypostasis is the ~~Orthodox~~ doctrine of the hypostatic union. The Hypostatic Union is "the technical term for the union of divine and human natures in the one being [i.e., Person] Jesus Christ. It is usually contrasted with the idea of a moral union of two wills (the divine and human) in Jesus. Orthodox doctrine [i.e., church dogma] affirms the H.U. and rejects a moral union"[6] It refers to the union of the divine and human natures in the one person of Jesus Christ. This union is not a moral or symbolic one, but a real and substantial union, where the divine and human natures are united in the person of Jesus Christ.

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[6] Van A. Harvey, *A Handbook of Theological Terms* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), [128]

To put it another way, Jesus's humanity lacks independent personhood. It does not exist as something identified as a separate person, but instead finds its existence and personal identity through its union with the eternal divine person of the Son. When the Gospel of John author writes that "the Word became flesh," this union is real and personal. Here, the divine Son fully assumes humanity while remaining the eternal Word.

Another term to help understand the concept of the Incarnation is the concept of Spirit Christology. The ideas associated with this come from the Gospel of Luke 1:35; 3:22; 4:8–19. In Luke, the author points toward a Spirit Christology where the presence of the Holy Spirit is in Christ. The Spirit is presented as active from Jesus's conception through his public ministry. This is first seen in Jesus's anointing of the Holy Spirit at his baptism in Luke 3:22, his Holy Spirit-empowered mission as read about in Luke 4:8-19, which reveals that Jesus lived a human life dependent upon the Holy Spirit. Luke 4:14-15 says, "Jesus, in the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding region. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone."[3] This perspective complements the Logos Christology of John by showing that the incarnate Son's human life was Spirit-empowered. These insights reveal the Incarnation as a divine initiative and Spirit-filled human existence.

Finally, the doctrines of Modalism and Arianism highlight what the Incarnation is not. The accepted view of Spirit Christology and that Jesus is the Logos, separate from God and the Holy Spirit, who are three co-equal, co-eternal persons within the singular Godhead, argued against modalism and Arianism. In modalism, the distinctions of God- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are collapsed into one deity, which is a mere manifestation of the one divine person.[2] The church ultimately characterized modalism as a heresy because it can lead to the conclusion that God the Father suffered and died on the cross, which is called patripassianism. In this concept,

there is one God who has multiple "modes," thus modalism.[2] Another heresy that was combated with the Incarnation is Arianism. This was an early heresy of the church that maintained Jesus was not one with God but was instead created by God.[2] It denies Jesus's full divinity and claims that he was created, which goes against what is written in the opening verses of John, where the Logos was in the beginning. Both Arianism and modalism are refuted by what is written in John 1:1-14, which declares that the Word was with God, was God, and became flesh. The Incarnation, therefore, reveals a fundamental distinction of persons within the unity of the divine essence.

John 1:14 states, "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."[3] In order to understand that Jesus is the Word that became flesh, lived among us, and is the Father's Son, it is important to understand the concepts of the only begotten Son as well as anhypostasis. A foundational understanding of the Incarnation could and would likely be missed without these concepts.

The concept of the "only begotten son" helps me understand who is referenced when the passage states the "word became flesh." It also helps to understand more completely who the "father's only son" is within the passage. Here, in reference to the only begotten Son, the Incarnation is not the creation of a new being, but rather is the self-emptying or kenosis of the eternal Son, who assumed human nature without ceasing to be divine as seen in John 1:14. Here, when referencing that Jesus is the only begotten Son, it is stating that he is co-eternal and co-equal with the Father. It is important to understand that when John references the "word becoming flesh" and the "father's only son", the author speaks about the Incarnation of Jesus, described as the only-begotten Son, who is co-eternal and co-equal with God.

In order to understand when John 1:14 references that the Word becoming flesh, the concept of anhypostasis is important to understanding the passage. As stated earlier, the divine Son, Jesus, did not unite himself to an existing individual but instead assumed human nature into his own personhood. This doctrine provides an understanding of the Incarnation as God as the Son becoming human, assuming human nature without becoming another person, so in Jesus, divinity and humanity are united, "without confusion, without change, without division, without separation" as referenced in the Chalcedonian definition.[2] When it references the Word becoming flesh, the flesh is both divine and human. It is not another person, separate from the Godhead.

II. Discuss the difference between Anselm's satisfaction theory of atonement and Abelard's moral influence theory of atonement in relation to these texts: Mark 15:34; Luke 23:34 & 46. Why does one theory seem more convincing to you than the other?

Anselm of Canterbury writes about the Satisfaction Theory of Atonement. In this theory, sin dishonors God; therefore, it causes a debt that humans cannot pay. This theory presents atonement based on justice, honor, and satisfaction. Anselm proposed that sin impacts all people, beginning with the first sins of Adam and Eve, disobeying God, moving forward. For Anselm, our attempts at atonement fall short because we are unworthy.[7] As a result of incurring this debt, there must be a payment. Anselm argues that only a perfect sacrifice that is pure and unblemished can satisfy the wrath that comes from God because of human sin. DeWolf says, "The honor of God is infinite, so the satisfaction must likewise be infinite. Infinite satisfaction is impossible for finite men."[8] As a result of God's justice demanding satisfaction, Christ is sent to the world voluntarily to satisfy the outstanding debt owed, ultimately restoring humanity. Here, salvation is obtained due to Jesus's substitutionary satisfaction for all humanity.

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[7] Harold DeWolf, "Chapter 31," in *A Theology of the Living Church* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), 256–269.

In this theory, the two-nature Christology is fundamental. Anselm writes in *Cur Deus Homo*, "[The payment to God] should be perfect God and perfect man . . . For [one cannot atone for sin] unless he be very God and very man (Book Two: Chapter VII).[8] For Anselm's theory, "Christ satisfies God's divine justice."[8] The passage of Mark 15:34 is a text often used to support Anselm's position. In this text, Jesus says, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" from the cross.[2] Anselm believes that Jesus is taking on the weight of sin. Jesus is experiencing estrangement from God, followed by the restoration of divine justice due to a perfect sacrifice found in Jesus. The cross becomes the place where satisfaction is made and salvation is secured.

In contrast, Peter Abelard proposes another theory of atonement that provides a different emphasis and focus. Abelard proposes the Mortal Influence Theory of Atonement. For Abelard, he argues that "Our redemption through the suffering of Christ is that deeper love within us which not only frees us from slavery to sin, but also secures for us the true liberty of the children of God, in order that we might do all things out of love rather than out of fear—love for him that has shown us such grace that no greater can be found."[8] Abelard rejects the legalism that is proposed by Anselm's theory. Instead of legalism, he emphasizes that Christians should love God. Abelard believes God does not demand a sacrifice from humanity. Instead, he believes Christ's life and death show God's love.[8] Rather than a payment owed to God, the cross is the ultimate expression of compassion meant to inspire a loving response in humankind.

According to DeWolf, "Abelard saw in the suffering death of Christ the culminating revelation of God's love."[8] In this theory, the cross shows divine compassion and is believed to inspire renewal that leads to repentance and obedience. Here, atonement is not about a debt that needs to be paid, but rather about a change in a person's will through Jesus's example. A text that appears to support Abelard's perspective can be found in Luke 23:24 and 46 where Christ

prays, “Father, forgive them” (Luke 23:34) and “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46).[3] It appears that these words portray not the divine retribution that Anselm proposes, but rather divine compassion and trust where love that calls forth moral awakening and repentance in humanity can be seen. For Abelard, these scenes from Luke depict a God who redeems not through punishment but through the transformative power of love. This is a love that invites repentance, reconciliation, and renewal. The cross does not satisfy divine wrath but reveals divine grace.

The significant differences between these two theories surround how they interpret the nature of God’s response to sin and humanity’s response to God. In Anselm’s theory, in response to God’s divine justice, there needs to be a pure and just sacrifice to atone for humanity’s sin.[8] In Abelard’s theory, as a result of God’s demonstration of love and divine compassion for humanity, humanity’s response is to love God.[8] Anselm’s theory is about terms associated with justice and satisfaction of sin, while Abelard’s theory is about love and moral transformation. There is a profoundly different approach to each of the theories of atonement. For Anselm, the emphasis is on Mark 15:34, where Jesus says, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” alluding to Christ’s bearing of humanity’s sin.[3] The text that emphasizes Abelard’s position can be seen in Luke 23:34, where Jesus states, “Father, forgive them,” and Luke 23:46, where he says, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.”[3]

For various reasons, Peter Abelard’s Moral Influence Theory of Atonement appears more convincing. Even though Anselm’s theory is the model I grew up being taught, I believe Abelard’s theory of atonement is the more convincing theory of atonement. The area I struggle with the most is that Anselm’s shows God as legalistic or punitive. The God of his atonement theory appears to keep a judgmental record of wrongs that must be corrected. This portrayal of

God in Anselm's theory is a source of personal struggle for me, as it seems to prioritize damnation over compassion, judgment over grace. In contrast, Abelard portrays God as loving, which resonates more with me. Abelard's theory highlights that 'Jesus died as the demonstration of God's love', which can 'change the hearts and minds of the sinners, turning them back to God.'[8] In comparison to Anselm's theory, Abelard's focus on the aspects of God that are relational and restorative is more appealing. When looking through the lens of Luke 23, God's mercy, love, and compassion become the focus of the events of the cross rather than legal satisfaction.

III. Explain the meaning and significance of Christ's Resurrection using 1 Corinthians 15:12-22. Reflect on how your understanding of the Resurrection shapes your Christology, ministry, and engagement with contemporary issues.

In 1 Corinthians 15:12-22, Paul's discussion revolves around the resurrection of the dead, which he uses to underscore the pivotal role of the resurrection of Christ. As Heine points out, Paul' places the resurrection of Jesus at the center of the Christian message.'[2] He doesn't present the resurrection as a mere miraculous event, but rather as a theological claim, as stated in 1 Corinthians 15: 16-17, 'For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins'[3] Paul's theological claim is clear: without the resurrection of Jesus, the entire structure of our faith collapses- it is 'futile', to use Paul's words.

Paul's argument starts with refuting the belief that appears to be circulating within the Corinthian church, mainly that some state that there is no resurrection that occurs for the dead. Paul states in 1 Corinthians 15:12, "Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?"[3] As stated previously, he presents that the resurrection is not a miraculous event, but rather, as stated in 1 Corinthians 15:20, that it is the "first fruits" of something even greater: a greater harvest.[3] Paul sees Christ's resurrection as a

renewal of creation. He supports this argument by using “an analogy between Adam and Christ on the one hand, and our present body and resurrected body on the other.”[2]

According to Paul's letter to the church in Corinth, the resurrection of Christ is a powerful expression of God’s new order, where all who belong to Christ will share in a resurrected life. This transformative power of the resurrection is evident in the discussion surrounding the resurrected body. Heine explains, 'our present bodies are from the earth; our resurrected bodies will not be.'[2] Paul’s logic follows an if-then or conditional argument, as seen in 1 Corinthians 15:13-17. For Paul, if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, then our faith is futile, and humanity remains in sin. The resurrection of Christ overturns sin and conquers the power of death. Paul argues that the resurrection of Christ is a reversal of humanity’s fall, as seen in Genesis 3. While Adam’s disobedience brought corruption, through Christ’s obedience, restoration is brought.

Reflecting on the meaning of the resurrection, my understanding profoundly shapes my Christology, ministry, and engagement with contemporary issues. First, Christology, the resurrection shapes and defines my Christology as incarnational and redemptive. The risen Christ is not detached from human suffering but remains the crucified one who bears the marks of love. The resurrection presents Jesus as Immanuel, or God with us. Not only does Jesus, through his passion, present himself as the crucified one who can identify with our human experiences, including joy, sadness, temptation, frustration, etc., but the resurrection also shows Jesus as the risen lord who embodies a power that is divine and renews life. Through the resurrection, my Christology reflects the idea that Jesus is not far off, judging, and not interested in humanity, but rather shows that Christ is fully engaged in the world and its redemption. In thinking about the resurrection and its impact on my Christology, a paradox exists- the risen Christ is still also the

crucified Christ. Christ still bears the scars of suffering, but he also embodies new life. This can be seen when Christ appears to the disciples in the locked room, telling them to feel his scars and see his wounds. The wounds remain, but Christ is also the resurrected one, personifying new life. For my Christology, Christ's redemption does not erase suffering- his or ours, but rather transfigures that suffering into new life, a resurrected life, a resurrected Christology.

Secondly, in ministry, the resurrection both challenges and calls us to express and share the hope of renewal even as the world is in despair. The resurrection inspires a pastoral vision that accompanies parishioners through 'death-like' experiences such as injustice, grief, marginalization, and even death itself. It also calls us to bear witness to the God who can raise life from those broken and 'death-like' experiences. The resurrection's impact on pastoral ministry is profound because in proclaiming that Christ has been risen, it also affirms life. It points out that regardless of death, whether that is a spiritual, social, or even physical one, it does not have the final word. Our ministry is steeped in the hope of the resurrection- that God is with us and we can be restored and made new. As members of the body of Christ, we are part of a resurrected body, which means that the church is challenged and called to participate in the work of renewal. In the spirit of Paul's argument, the resurrection is not a private miracle but a communal calling: if Christ is raised, we are also called to rise in newness of life. When engaging with people and in communities that are burdened and struggling with the challenges of grief, oppression, or despair, the resurrection of Christ shows us that God's power continues to act even in the darkest of places as well as the darkest of circumstances.

Third, in engaging contemporary issues, the resurrection provides the ethical and theological lens through which the world is seen. Throughout the world and within the United States, there are oppressive systems of injustice that are crippling those who are marginalized

and often forgotten. Christ's resurrection testifies that justice will be served in the end and that the transformation of our world is possible. Through the power of the resurrection, humanity is shown that God is greater than any power on earth, as are the issues of today, the injustices, and the oppression experienced. The resurrection shapes ethical action by urging our engagement to make systems better. We are called to mirror this restorative power that God embodies. It also urges and augments the church's mission of being sacramental, an outward sign of inward resurrection reality, by calling us, those whom we serve, and the world to imagine life beyond the boundaries of death, despair, and division, and think about restoration and renewal.