

In Defense of Conciliar Christology: A Philosophical Essay, by Timothy Pawl, Oxford Studies in Analytic Theology, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, 272 pages, £65.00

ANDREW TER ERN LOKE

Faith and Global Engagement, University of Hong Kong

Can a person possess a divine nature and a human nature, given that inconsistent predicates are true of both? This is the Fundamental Problem addressed by Pawl as he attempts to defend the philosophical coherence of the Christology put forward by the first seven ecumenical councils of Christendom. He limits the scope of his book to considering objections that are philosophical in nature, stating that he will not consider objections to Conciliar Christology from Biblical exegesis or from purely historical grounds (p.5).

After meticulously going through the contents of Conciliar Christology in Chapter 1, Pawl lays out six necessary conditions for a viable metaphysical model of the incarnation given Conciliar Christology (pp.48-50). Pawl goes on to flesh out a metaphysical model, providing a helpful diagram (p.62) and summary (p.64), and making a number of helpful clarifications such as why a concrete (rather than abstract) view of natures should be preferred and why the term predication should be preferred to properties (pp.77-8).

From Chapter 4 onwards Pawl provides a detailed explication of the Fundamental Problem, comprehensively listing down 10 possible responses to this problem (p.94), and thoroughly analyses these responses. One of Pawl's main strategies for dealing with the Fundamental Problem is to reject what he calls 'Initial Truth conditions' (e.g. 's is temporal just in case s is inside time'; 's is atemporal just in case s is not inside time') and to replace them with Revised Truth Conditions (e.g. 's is temporal just in case s has a concrete nature that is inside time'; 's is atemporal just in case s has a concrete nature such that it is not the case that that nature is inside time' p.191). In the rest of the book, Pawl uses this strategy to address a variety of apparently inconsistent predicates.

This book provides a thorough analysis of the views of Conciliar Fathers, clarifications of many problems, and rigorous arguments against many objections and many unworkable responses to problems. I agree that using Revised Truth Conditions involving concrete natures is a good way to respond to many apparently inconsistent predicates with regards to the Incarnation; a number of scholars have used similar strategies before (see Loke 2014, 96). Indeed, I agree with Pawl on many points, but disagree with him concerning atemporality, immutability and the Two-Consciousnesses Model. As I would like to explain my disagreement in greater detail, the disproportionate space taken up by my explanation below might give the false impression that I have more disagreement than agreement with Pawl.

To begin, I do not think that Pawl's strategy can be successfully employed with regards to essential atemporality and strong immutability, which Pawl affirms against the view of many contemporary theologians.

Pawl assumes that creating a human nature and a particular hypostatic union does not require change (pp. 205-206). However, as he notes, the assumption that creating does not require a real change in the Creator is controversial. It is a weakness of the book that Pawl does not cite any literature that argues for this important assumption nor does he offer any argument for it, merely stating that it would take him too far afield from Christology to do so (pp. 205-206).

Pawl also utilizes the idea of 'Mixed Relations', which requires a change only on the part of one of the relata, and he insists that 'the incarnation requires no change in the divine nature, but rather the human nature and the hypostatic union both begin to exist, and, given the nature of the hypostatic union and what it does, the Word is incarnate' (p.206). But does not the hypostatic union include the divine person, and the beginning of existence of this union involve a change in this part of the relata? Pawl writes 'When becoming incarnate, the

Son took on (assumed) a nature that was inside time. So he gained a nature...' (p.194). But how does 'took on', 'assumed' and 'gained' not involve a change? Pawl would agree that the union does involve the divine person, and that 'the person of the Word changes as a consequence of the incarnation' (p.206). However, Pawl insists that 'the divine nature does not change' (pp.206-208); this insistence is necessary for him to claim that the Son can change yet count as immutable according to the Revised Truth Conditions.

Pawl's insistence requires a distinction between divine person and divine concrete nature. Proponents of the so-called 'paradox of increase' against Concrete-nature Christology would argue that the pre-incarnate divine nature=the Second Person of the Trinity (Le Poidevin 2009, 178), given which Pawl's insistence would fail. However, Pawl does not address this paradox. To respond to this paradox, one should not argue that the divine Person is a separate concrete entity from the divine nature, for otherwise there would be an extra concrete divine entity. Rather, one has to concede that the divine Person is coincident with concrete divine nature. Nevertheless, one can reply to the paradox by arguing that the Person and concrete divine nature are distinct; this can be argued for by applying a modified hylomorphic theory to immaterial entities. This theory can account for why the conjoining of human nature makes the human nature a part of the Son but not a part of the divine concrete nature (see section 4.6.2 of Loke 2014). Nevertheless, given the coincidence of divine person and concrete divine nature, the beginning of existence of a union involving the divine person would involve the concrete divine nature as well, and thus also involve the latter in a change. Therefore, the strong sense of immutability cannot be maintained. Given that such a change involves time, essential atemporality cannot be maintained as well.

It is significant that the examples of Mixed Relation mentioned by Pawl on p.206 (viz. 'if you go from not thinking about me to thinking about me', 'if my son, Henry, goes from being shorter than I am to being taller than me', and 'Henry might go from being the

youngest child in the family to not being the youngest child’) do not involve any sort of metaphysical union. They are therefore disanalogous to the Incarnation. It is also significant that Pawl does not address the problematic issue of providing a metaphysical account of the way in which only the body of Jesus belonged to the Word, a problem raised by Merricks (2007). As argued above, such an account of genuine metaphysical union would require the rejection of strong immutability and essential atemporality; I provide such an account using the Divine Preconscious Model (DPM) in Loke (2014, 101-104).

Another problem with Pawl’s book concerns the number of consciousnesses and persons. Pawl affirms a Two Consciousnesses Model but insists that there is only one person. While defending Dyothelitism Pawl supposes the divine will sets parameters around some activities of the human will, ‘similar to a parent teaching a child to walk’ (p.220). Objectors would point out that parent and child are two different persons.

In Loke (2014, 47) I argued that, on the Two Consciousnesses model and with reference to Mark 13:32, the Son would have self-consciousness SC1: ‘I am aware of myself being consciously aware of the day of my coming’; and simultaneously self-consciousness SC2: ‘I am aware of myself being consciously unaware of the day of my coming’, that ‘myself being consciously aware’ occurs in SC1 and ‘myself being consciously unaware’ occurs in SC2, and that these two self-consciousnesses are contradictory and therefore cannot exist in the same self simultaneously.

In response, Pawl (p.224) draws a distinction between a thing which is self-conscious (the person...), and the faculty in virtue of which the person is self-conscious. He suggests that, in the Incarnation case, counting self-consciousness by faculties in virtue of which something is self-conscious, the number is two, while counting self-consciousness by supposita that are conscious, the number is one. Pawl challenges the claim that SC1 and SC2 are contradictory by suggesting the following Revised Truth Conditionals:

-s is consciously aware of p just in case s has a nature that has an occurrent mental state (of the right sort) of p

-s is consciously unaware of p just in case s has a nature that does not have an occurrent mental state (of the right sort) of p.

However, such a move does not account for the first person perspective of Christ, or his “I-thoughts.’ Bayne observes that it would be possible for Christ to think of himself (as himself) in either of his consciousnesses (Bayne 2001, 136). Pawl does not give an account of how Christ would think of himself; he might reply that, given the stated goals of the book, he does not have to explain “how” it works. However, I would argue that consideration of first person perspective is essential to counting number of persons, and that this issue should not be avoided in chapter 9 in which Pawl is attempting to reply to problems concerning the number of persons (he titled the chapter ‘Number Troubles’). As Bayne points out, the first person perspective is a problem besetting the Two Consciousnesses Model, and I have argued that consideration of first person perspective given the Two Consciousnesses Model would imply more than one person in Christ (Loke 2014, 47-48).

I have also previously argued (citing DeWeese 2007, 133–4) that, on the Two Consciousnesses Model, the human consciousness and the divine consciousness could encounter and address each other simultaneously, thus they could exist in a simultaneous I–Thou relationship, which implies two persons. Pawl replies by reformulating my premise as follows: ‘If the consciousness could address each other in an I-thou relationship, then Nestorianism is true.’ (p.226). He objects that the ‘consciousness’ is not referring to the supposit, but to the nature, or faculty by which the supposit is conscious, and since neither nature is identical to a person, the consequent is false’ (p.226). Pawl goes on to say that ‘These two faculties could be pointed at one another as the ‘thou’ of their thoughts (or, better,

the thoughts the supposit has due to the activities they perform),’ but he denies that this entails two persons (p.226).

Such a response again fails to account for the first person perspective of Christ, or his “I-thoughts.” How would Christ think of himself then, if he were to have two faculties which could be pointed at one another as the ‘thou’? Pawl seems to have neglected the Scriptural evidences for thinking that an I-thou relationship implies two persons. For example, when Christ prayed ‘not *my* will but *yours* be done’ (Mark 14:36; italics mine) — which revealed his first person perspective— he was evidently aware that he was not talking to himself but to another person: the Father.

Pawl (p.227) notes that I defined personhood following the Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy: ‘the property of being a person has been thought to involve various traits, including (moral) agency, reason or rationality, language or the cognitive skills language may support (such as intentionality and self-consciousness), and the ability to enter into suitable relationship with other persons (Audi ed. 1999, 662).’ In reply, my definition is not merely based on a philosophy dictionary, but also on Scriptural passages such as Mark 14:36, according to which Christ exemplifies these traits. Pawl objects ‘Since, on Conciliar Christology, the human nature of Christ, says “the Father is greater than I,” and grows in wisdom, the human nature fulfils the definition of “person” that Loke is employing’ (p.227). In reply, it is not the human nature of Christ which does the saying; rather, it is the person of Christ who says, in respect of his functional subordinate role, that “the Father is greater than I.” Growing in wisdom does not imply that the human nature has a self-consciousness of its own apart from that of Christ (indeed, on the one-consciousness DPM, that is not the case), and hence the human nature does not fulfil the definition of person.

In sum, the Two Consciousnesses Model is beset with the problem of Nestorianism. The problem for Pawl is that this model seems to be the only model of Christ’s consciousness

which is consistent with essential atemporality and strong immutability, and Pawl is committed to these because he thinks that they are taught by the Conciliar Fathers (pp.108-9). However, it should be noted that the main reason why Conciliar Fathers employed terms taken from philosophy (e.g. hypostasis) rather than Scriptures in the first place was to use them as interpretative norms in their attempt to ensure that the Scriptures would be understood in the way that the Scriptural authors had intended them (Athanasius, *Defence of the Nicene Definition* 5.18-24, esp. 5.21). All the talk about Christ being atemporal and immutable qua divine was intended to convey the idea that Christ is truly divine within a context that was deeply influenced by Greek philosophy. Many contemporary philosophers and theologians who are not so deeply influenced by this context would reject essential atemporality and strong immutability. They would argue (rightly in my view, see Loke 2014, chapter 4) that the Scriptures do not have to be interpreted as affirming both of these, and that the views of Conciliar Fathers are not binding on Christians as are the Scriptures. A Christian can follow the spirit rather than the letters of the Conciliar Fathers by affirming that Christ is truly divine and truly human without insisting that his divine nature is essentially atemporal and immutable in the strong sense, and without holding to the Two Consciousnesses Model. I am aware that this is not how Pawl frames his project, which is to begin by supposing the fathers got it right in the letters of the statements, not merely the spirit. Pawl and I agree on the spirit; however, I think that some of the letters are indefensible in light of the objections explained above. In my view, the one-consciousness DPM is a better model of the Incarnation which is consistent with Scriptures and defensible against objections.

Bibliography

Audi, R. ed. 1999. *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bayne, T. 2001. 'The inclusion model of the Incarnation: problems and prospects'. *Religious Studies* 37(2): 125–41.

DeWeese, G. 2007. 'One person, two natures: two metaphysical models of the Incarnation'. In *Jesus in Trinitarian Perspective* ed. F. Sanders and K. Issler. Nashville: B&H Academic

Le Poidevin, R. 2009. 'Identity and the composite Christ: an incarnational dilemma'. *Religious Studies* 45(2): 167–86.

Loke, A. 2014. *A Kryptic Model of the Incarnation*. London: Routledge.

Merricks, T. 2007. 'The Word made flesh: dualism, physicalism and the Incarnation'. In *Persons: Human and Divine* ed. P. Van Inwagen and D. Zimmerman. Oxford: Clarendon.
