



## Relations in Creation and Christology: A Response to Porter

Brendan Case 

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### Abstract

In a recent, provocative essay (“Inheriting Wittgenstein’s Augustine,” *New Blackfriars* (February, 2018)), Philip Porter criticizes Augustine’s habit of drawing analogies between the embodiment of concepts in language and the Incarnation of the Word as Jesus of Nazareth, suggesting that his distinctions encourage us to drive a wedge between God the Son and the human being, Jesus, whom he is. Porter worries that Augustine succumbs to the linguistic and then theological fantasy that we might peel away the word’s flesh, to attain to the Word beneath. He proposes to dissolve this fantasy by way of a Wittgensteinian revision of Augustine’s linguistic Christology, eschewing the distinction between the “*verbum mentis*” and the “*verbum vocis*,” the better to safeguard the unity of Christ. In what follows, I suggest that while Augustine is indeed tempted toward Christological error by an inappropriate extension of the linguistic analogy, Porter’s proposed corrective both neglects important resources from the developed Chalcedonian tradition, and has as its unhappy outcome that “God is robbed of his transcendence, and creation of its true gratuity.”

### Keywords

Creation, Christology, Non-Reciprocal Relations, Augustine, Aquinas, Philip Porter

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that Augustine succumbs to the linguistic and then theological fantasy that we might peel away the word's flesh, to attain to the Word beneath. He proposes to dissolve this fantasy by way of a Wittgensteinian revision of Augustine's linguistic Christology, eschewing the distinction between the "verbum mentis" and the "verbum vocis," the better to safeguard the unity of Christ. In what follows, I suggest that while Augustine is indeed tempted toward Christological error by an inappropriate extension of the linguistic analogy, Porter's proposed corrective both neglects important resources from the developed Chalcedonian tradition, and has as its unhappy outcome that "God is robbed of his transcendence, and creation of its true gratuity."<sup>2</sup>

### Logos and Language in Augustine: A Fantasy

One of Augustine's clearest attempts to braid together Christology and philosophy of language appears in the first of his *Tractates on John*. Commenting on John 1:1 ("*In principio erat Verbum, et Verbum erat apud Deum, et Deus erat Verbum*"), Augustine distinguishes between the word that sounds externally in our speech, and the "word in the human being, which remains within. That is the true word which is said spiritually, what you understand from the sound, not the sound itself."<sup>3</sup> The exterior word "Deus" is the "sound," while the inner word is what we understand from it.<sup>4</sup> The inner word, however, is also "what the sound signified, and what is in the thinker who said it"<sup>5</sup>: another way Augustine captures the idea of language's content is by depicting words as signifying, aiming at, concepts.

As he elaborates the point in *De Doctrina Christiana*, language is a form of conventional signification.<sup>6</sup> In natural signification (smoke signifying fire, a frown signifying anger), the linkage between sign and signified is discovered, not made, but in language, the link between a particular set of sounds and a concept is imposed or stipulated. The point of exchanging these conventional signs, Augustine suggests, is that by virtue of their being subordinated to particular concepts, they allow John to bring it about that Jane thinks

<sup>2</sup> David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), p. 157).

<sup>3</sup> *In Evangelium Iohannis Tractatus* (PL 35; [http://www.augustinus.it/latino/commento\\_vsg/index2.htm](http://www.augustinus.it/latino/commento_vsg/index2.htm)) 1.8). Unless otherwise noted, translations from Latin are my own.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Philip Cary suggests that Augustine's "innovation is the notion that to speak is to give signs" (*Outward Signs*, 75). For a strikingly similar account of language in Plotinus, however, cf. *Enneads* (LCL 440; ed. A.H. Armstrong; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989) I.2, 3.30-34, V.1, 3.9-10, and discussion in John Heiser, *Logos and Language in the Philosophy of Plotinus* (E. Mellen, 1991), esp. pp. 20-21.

his thoughts after him: “Conventional signs are those which living things exchange so as to indicate to one another, as much possible, either things sensed or understood. Nor is there any other reason for our giving signs, than to introduce or bring into another’s soul that which the one who gives the sign bears in his own soul.”<sup>7</sup> Words are concepts embodied in some suitable medium – soundwaves, inked lines, even (though this interests Augustine much less) the neurochemical firings of the brain.<sup>8</sup>

Unsurprisingly, this theory became intertwined in Augustine’s thought with the Incarnation of the Word (Jn. 1:14). A concept “in a sense is the offspring of your mind, the son of your heart,”<sup>9</sup> and just as “our word is, in a certain way, made into the body’s voice, by assuming that in which it is manifested to human senses,” so too “the Word of God was made flesh by assuming that in which it would be manifested to human senses.”<sup>10</sup> A further parallel makes the analogy all the more attractive: “It is by assuming it, not by being consumed into it, that both our word becomes sound and that Word became flesh.”<sup>11</sup> The spoken word “triangle” is subordinated to the concept of a triangle, so as to be (under conditions of ordinary language) transparent to it, but the concept of a triangle is not changed by this subordination; it is what it is, whether a particular language – or indeed, any language at all – has a word subordinated to it. So too, God the Word is not changed by the Incarnation; as Cyril and his heirs would put it, the Word is joined to passible humanity, and undergoes that humanity’s passion, but *impassibly*.<sup>12</sup>

Now, to a point, Porter seems to have no problem with this: “What spurs Augustine, in this instance, to search for this inner, pre-linguistic word is a theoretical, proto-Chalcedonian point about the two natures of the divine-human person Jesus Christ... In this

<sup>7</sup> *De doctrina Christiana* (PL 34; [http://www.augustinus.it/latino/dottrina\\_cristiana/index.htm](http://www.augustinus.it/latino/dottrina_cristiana/index.htm)) 2.2.3.

<sup>8</sup> That silent thought doesn’t, for Augustine, consist in *verba mentis* is clear in the opening of *De catechizandis rudibus*: “ille intellectus quasi rapida coruscatione perfundit animum, illa autem locutio tarda et longa est, longeque dissimilis, et dum ista volvitur, iam se ille in secreta sua condidit; tamen, quia vestigia quaedam miro modo impressit memoriae, perdurant illa cum syllabarum morulis; atque ex eisdem vestigiis sonantia signa peragimus, quae lingua dicitur vel Latina, vel Graeca, vel Hebraea, vel alia quaelibet, **sive cogitentur haec signa sive etiam voce proferantur**; cum illa vestigia nec Latina, nec Graeca vel Hebraea, nec cuiusque alterius gentis sint propria, sed ita efficiantur in animo, ut vultus in corpore” (PL 40; [http://www.augustinus.it/latino/catechesi\\_cristiana/index.htm](http://www.augustinus.it/latino/catechesi_cristiana/index.htm); 1.2.3).

<sup>9</sup> *In Ev. Ioh. Tract.* 1.9.

<sup>10</sup> *De Trin.* 15.11.20.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* Cf. Porter, “Inheriting Wittgenstein’s Augustine,” p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Cyril, “Scholia on the Incarnation of the Only Begotten,” §8, in John McGuckin, *Cyril of Alexandria: The Christological Controversy, Its History, Theology, and Texts* (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir’s Press, 2006).

context, the analogy is being deployed simply to avoid the mistake of saying that by becoming incarnate the Word of God is changed into (as opposed to united with) a human being.”<sup>13</sup> (Note, however, the infelicitously worded, “the Word of God is united with a human being”; we’ll consider below what might be wrong with this formulation, and what difference it makes for the argument.) If the *verbum mentis/verbum vocis* analogy were simply a way of flagging the incarnate Word’s subsistence in two irreducible natures, Porter seems to suggest, he would have no quarrel with Augustine’s linguistic Christology. The trouble, though, is that Augustine sometimes fantasizes about heavenly trysts with the naked *Verbum*, both human and divine.

Augustine, that is, sometimes writes as though he could hold his concepts up against his words, the better to compare them. For instance, Porter quotes an unguarded moment from *De catechizandis rudibus*: “It is almost always the fact that my speech displeases myself. For I am covetous of something better, the possession of which I frequently enjoy within me before I commence to body it forth in intelligible words: and then when my capacities of expression prove inferior to my inner apprehensions, I grieve over the inability which my tongue has betrayed in answering to my heart.”<sup>14</sup> One difficulty here is with the word “before (*antequam*),” which suggests that Augustine imagines the mind’s encounter with the concept as a moment in time which precedes his attempt to embody it in speech. He doesn’t always – or even, so far as I can tell, usually – treat the concept/word relation this way, however; sometimes the relation is assimilated to that between time and eternity, as in his account of his and Monica’s insight into the LORD at Ostia.<sup>15</sup>

For Augustine, the true horizon for wordless intellection is eschatological: in heaven, he thinks, we will need neither the enfleshed words through which we communicate now (cf. *de civ. Dei* 22.29),<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Porter, “Inheriting Wittgenstein’s Augustine,” p. 7-8.

<sup>14</sup> “Inheriting Wittgenstein’s Augustine,” p. 13-14, quoting Augustine, “On the Catechising of the Uninstructed,” in *St. Augustine: On the Holy Trinity, Doctrinal Treatises, Moral Treatises*, trans. S. D. F. Salmond, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 2.3.

<sup>15</sup> “Quaerebamus inter nos apud praesentem veritatem quod tu [sc. the LORD] es dum loquimur et inhiamus illi, attingimus eam [sc. Sapientia] modice toto ictu cordis” (*Conf.* 9.10.24). Notice – they attained to wisdom in a flash of insight (toto ictu), while they were speaking (dum loquimur). Cf. Philip Cary’s comments in *Outward Signs*, 184.

<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, Porter seems not only to share Augustine’s ambivalence about natural language, but to radicalize that ambivalence by construing natural language as such an artifact of the Fall, e.g., “Our linguistic failings are not failures of language, but failures of humanity. These failures are attributable to, are a product of, Original Sin. Viewed in this way, we can see language for what it is, a fallen human activity” (“Inheriting Wittgenstein’s Augustine,” 15). For Augustine’s reflections on Hebrew as the language spoken in Eden, cf. *De civ. Dei* 16.11.

nor, calamitously, the enfleshed Word through which we now know the LORD:

From this we understand that nothing in this life ought to detain us on the way, when not even the Lord himself, inasmuch as he deigned to be our way, will hold us, but rather wants us to pass on; nor should we cling to temporal things, even things he took on and bore for our salvation, but rather run through them quickly, that we might merit to be brought to him in himself, who freed our nature from temporal things and gathered it to the right hand of the Father.<sup>17</sup>

Just prior to this quotation, Augustine even, like Bultmann *avant la lettre*, introduces 2 Corinthians 5:16 as authorizing a disinterest (if only heavenly) in the flesh of Christ. It is telling that Augustine's passing comment in *De civitate Dei* that in heaven "our very thoughts will be visible to one another"<sup>18</sup> comes at the end of a discussion of the "spiritual vision" of the divine nature which will be possible in and through our resurrected "spiritual bodies," a discussion which includes not one reference to the ascended flesh of Christ (cf. again *de civ. Dei* 22.29).

This is a problem for Augustine's Christology, it's true: he ought rather to have said that our journey through the Son's humanity into his divinity continues even in heaven, whose joys will be magnified by the delights of true Eucharistic communion with Christ's flesh, no longer veiled by the accidents of bread and wine.<sup>19</sup> But is it a problem caused by his account of language? Why not say instead that this is where the analogy between human language and Incarnation breaks down?<sup>20</sup> After all, if we extend the incarnational model of language to account for (intra-linguistic) synonymy and (inter-linguistic)

<sup>17</sup> *De Doct. Chr.* 1.34.38.

<sup>18</sup> "Patebunt etiam cogitationes nostrae invicem nobis" (*De civitate Dei* (PL 41; <http://www.augustinus.it/latino/cdd/index2.htm>) 22.39.6.

<sup>19</sup> Aquinas is much better about this, and never more so than in the final stanza of his *Adoro te devote*: "Jesu, quem velatum nunc aspicio, / Oro, fiat illud quod tam sitio: / Ut te revelata cernens facie, / Visu sim beatus tuæ gloriæ. Amen" (Textum Matrini, 2007; <http://www.corpusthomicum.org/pat.html>). Cf. also Julian of Norwich: "Than shall we ale come into oure lorde, ourselve clerely knowing and God fulsomly having; and we endlessly be alle had in God, him verely seyeng and fulsomly feling, and him gostely hering, and him delectably smelling, and him swetly swelwing [swallowing]" (*A Revelation of Love in The Writings of Julian of Norwich* (Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins (eds.); University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006) §43, p. 259).

<sup>20</sup> Porter observes, "While it's true that this approach to language can be employed to make a proper distinction between the natures, it's also true that the intellectual habit that desires to separate the pre-linguistic and linguistic word can introduce a division precisely where there ought not to be one" (Porter, "Inheriting Wittgenstein's Augustine," 15). Perhaps the substance of the analogy matters less than how far it's extended.

translatability,<sup>21</sup> it would seem to suggest, not the unrepeatability of every concept in a unique sonic or inscriptional “body,” but rather a kind of conceptual metempsychosis, in which concepts roam from one linguistic body to another, just “as a caterpillar, having come to the end of one blade of grass, draws itself together and reaches out for the next.”<sup>22</sup> Or (to tarry a moment longer with the analogy) perhaps we ought to say that the indispensability of Christ’s ascended flesh derives from the fact that the Incarnation is the paradigmatic assertion, the only linguistic event in which the sign captures – if only we have eyes to see it, and everlasting time in which to read it – the infinite fullness which the Father knows in conceiving his Word. It seems to me, then, that Augustine’s linguistic analogies are neutral with respect to this particular Christological error.

### Non-Reciprocal Relations (I): Creation

As Porter sees it, however, Augustine’s fantasies about getting beyond embodied words don’t only mislead him about the enduring significance of Christ’s flesh, but equally ensnare him in false distinctions between Jesus and the divine Word. Augustine, Porter reminds us, rules out predicating “accidents” of the LORD on grounds of divine simplicity; applied to God, the Aristotelian categories reduce to two, substantial and relational predicates.<sup>23</sup> But Augustine also denies that statements describing the LORD’s changing relations to creation pick out any changes in him: since the truth-values of these statements change as creatures change, the corresponding properties in God would change too, and divine immutability bars that path like a flaming sword. A statement such as, “Lord, you have become our refuge,”<sup>24</sup> is parallel, Augustine suggests, to a coin’s being counted as the price of a bushel of wheat.<sup>25</sup> Both need to be analyzed in terms of what the scholastics would call “real” and “logical relations”: “We were worse before we took refuge in him, and we become better by taking refuge in him. But in him, no change at all.”<sup>26</sup>

<sup>21</sup> For suggestions about the importance of concepts and propositions (“mental language,” broadly construed) in accounting for translatability and synonymy, cf. Paul Vincent Spade, *Thoughts, Words, and Things*, pp. 95-100.

<sup>22</sup> “As a caterpillar, having come to the end of one blade of grass, draws itself together and reaches out for the next, so the Self, having come to the end of one life and dispelled all ignorance, gathers in his faculties and reaches out from the old body to a new” (*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* [trans. Easwaran Eknath; Nilgiri Press, 2007] 4.4.3).

<sup>23</sup> *De Trin.* 5.5, 5.9; cf. Porter, “Inheriting Wittgenstein’s Augustine,” pp. 7-8.

<sup>24</sup> “Domine, refugium factus es nobis” (Ps. 90:1).

<sup>25</sup> *De Trin.* 5.17.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, cf. Porter, “Inheriting Wittgenstein’s Augustine,” p. 8.

Aquinas takes over Augustine's account of a non-reciprocal God-world relation. For him, while creaturely life is entirely (so to speak) "dative," given over to the LORD,<sup>27</sup> the Trinity who is the LORD is "nominative" with respect to creatures, entirely unconditioned by creation.<sup>28</sup> As Kathryn Tanner summarizes the principle, now become venerable: "Talk in which the character of divine agency varies with its effects [is] able to be reduced without remainder to talk about the self-same divine will having different created effects."<sup>29</sup> But this is so, for Aquinas, only because the LORD is eternally conditioned by the relations of gift and exchange that constitute his life – *ad intra*, the Triune life too is entirely dative.<sup>30</sup> When Aquinas says that God has logical relations to creatures, even though the Father has real relations to the Son, this is what he means: creatures are conditioned by God, but God unconditioned by creatures; only God conditions God. The LORD is absolutely free in his relations to creation, because he is who he is (cf. Exod 3:14), with or without it; creatures, by contrast, are purely gratuitous, the "play" of God (cf. Prov. 8:30).

### Non-Reciprocal Relations (II): Christology

Now, Porter raises no objections to this principle as applied to God's relations to creatures, with one exception – the human nature of Jesus. If "refugium factus es" picks only a logical relation in God, what of "caro factum est," predicated of the Word (Jn. 1:14)? Porter summarizes his worry this way: "We want to say that God becomes flesh in such a way that Jesus of Nazareth is God, and it is not clear that we can mean this if we affirm the same kind of relation existing between Jesus and the Word as between the price of an object and a coin."<sup>31</sup> Rephrasing and unpacking a bit, we might wonder: does the *verbum mentis/verbum vocis* analogy for the Incarnation suggest that

<sup>27</sup> "Creatio in creatura non sit nisi relatio quaedam ad creatorem, ut ad principium sui esse; sicut in passione quae est cum motu, importatur relatio ad principium motus" (*Summa Theologiae* (Textum Leoninum, 1888; <http://www.corpusthomicum.org/iopera.html>) 1.45.3).

<sup>28</sup> *Summa Theologiae* 1.45.3. Elsewhere, Aquinas appeals in this connection to Augustine's discussion of divine-creaturely relations in *De Trinitate* 5.16: "Augustinus dicit, quod creator relative dicitur ad creaturam, sicut dominus ad servum" (*De potentia* (Textum Taurini, 1953; <http://www.corpusthomicum.org/qdp1.html>) 7.8 s.c.).

<sup>29</sup> Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1988), p. 103.

<sup>30</sup> "Pater non dicitur nisi a paternitate, et filius a filiatione. Si igitur paternitas et filiatio non sunt in Deo realiter, sequitur quod Deus non sit realiter pater aut filius, sed secundum rationem intelligentiae tantum, quod est haeresis Sabelliana" (*Summa Theologiae* 1.28.1 sc).

<sup>31</sup> Porter, "Inheriting Wittgenstein's Augustine," p. 9.



Jesus is only incidentally related to the Word whom he embodies, like two hapless commuters crashing into one another on the subway?

Recall that I earlier flagged a solecism on Porter's part ("the Word of God is united with a human being"<sup>32</sup>); the same infelicity reappears here, in Porter's statement about "the relation existing between Jesus and the Word."<sup>33</sup> Now this sort of statement – which abstracts Jesus from the Word in order to "relate" them – is, at first glance, Nestorian; the creeping Nestorianism which Porter detects in Augustine's thought is perhaps just the shadow cast across it by some of his own formulations. (This is not Porter's only way of putting things, as we'll see below, but it's a formulation which seeps in even when he intends only to speak of the divine and human *natures*.<sup>34</sup>) Porter rightly jumps back from this Nestorian shadow, but his vaulting ambition, seeking safer ground, o'erleaps itself, and falls on the opposite error of Monophysitism. Where Porter goes wrong, both in rejecting the Augustinian position on the relation of Christ's two natures, and in his own revisionist proposal, he does so because he's held captive by this picture of Jesus and the Word as two objects needing to be related, either tied together with fraying string, as by Nestorius, or fused into a single alloy, as by Eutyches. That picture lies in Porter's language, which repeats back to him a false choice between those opposed errors.<sup>35</sup>

Augustine, it has to be said, is not the most helpful interlocutor for resolving these kinds of questions, since his work, while certainly "proto-Chalcedonian,"<sup>36</sup> is innocent of the complexities imposed by the controversies over Nestorius and Eutyches, to say nothing of Severus of Antioch (fl. 512–38) or Sergius of Constantinople (d. 638), and so relatively underdetermined with respect to the concerns of classical Christology.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, he never, so far as I know or Porter reports, explicitly analyzes John 1:14 in terms of

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. also his claim, "The relation between the second person of the Trinity and Jesus of Nazareth is a real relation between God and a creature, but without change" (*Ibid.*, p. 10).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. a passage we'll consider again below: "The relation God has to Jesus of Nazareth is part of who God is. This is not to say that the divine and human natures are in any way confused, but that the particular relation between the divine nature in the second person of the Trinity and the human nature of Jesus of Nazareth obtains eternally" (*Ibid.*, p. 10).

<sup>35</sup> "A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably" (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (trans. Anscombe, Hacker, Schulte; Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) §115).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. esp. his talk of a "*susceptio quae Deum hominem faceret et hominem Deum*" (*De Trin.* 1.28).

<sup>37</sup> Augustine was invited by the Emperor Theodosius to attend the Council of Ephesus (431), but died before the invitation arrived (cf. Anna Crabbe, "The Invitation List to the Council of Ephesus and Metropolitan Hierarchy in the Fifth Century," *Theological Studies* 32.2 (Oct 1981), pp. 369-400, here p. 369). A fascinating piece of theological fan-fiction



his developing logic of non-reciprocal relations, though that logic is probably implicit in his use of the linguistic analogy.<sup>38</sup> The schoolmen, however, received and venerated both Augustine and the long tradition of Chalcedonian Christology (synthesized for them principally in Damascene's *De Fide Orthodoxa*), and they developed Christologies which integrated Augustine's account of the non-reciprocal Creator-creature relation into their treatments of the union of divine and human natures in the hypostasis of the Son.<sup>39</sup>

Now, if we compare Porter's formulations above to the long Chalcedonian tradition running from Cyril to (say) Aquinas, the first thing that stands out is that the latter theologians do not speculate about "the relation between Jesus and the Word," for the simple reason that, for them, Jesus *is* the Word. For Chalcedon, recall, there are two natures in one person, who is the Son: there is no "human person" Jesus to whom the Logos is united, since the only *person* in the God-man is God the Son, who assumes a complete human nature. This point is practically the whole burden of Cyril's campaign against Nestorius, whose key error (so the Alexandrian bishop thought) rested on the attempt to relate Jesus to the second person of the Trinity, as though he weren't that person from the start.<sup>40</sup>

Aquinas simply reprises this position: "A person in human nature is not presupposed to assumption, but rather, is related to it as the end-point of the assumption . . . For if it were presupposed, it must either have been corrupted—in which case it was assumed in vain; or it remains after the union—and thus there would be two persons, one assuming and the other assumed, which is false . . . And so it remains that the Son of God in no way assumed a human person."<sup>41</sup> If we accept this account of the Logos as the sole subject of the Incarnation, and of Logo's human nature as his "sacred instrument,"<sup>42</sup>

remains to be written, imagining Augustine's response to the debate between Cyril and Nestorius.

<sup>38</sup> E.g., "It is by assuming it, not by being consumed into it, that both our word becomes sound and that Word became flesh" (*De Trin.* 15.11.20).

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *De potentia* 7.8 ad 5, and *Summa Theologiae* 3.2.7 c.

<sup>40</sup> We can illustrate just with reference to his "Scholia on the Incarnation of the Only-Begotten": considering what the name "Jesus" refers to, Cyril writes, "We ought to speak only of one Son of God, who is Christ, and Emmanuel, and Jesus" (McGuckin, *The Christological Controversy*, p. 296). Explaining "how Christ is one," he observes that Paul says that all things are made through "one Lord Jesus Christ" (*Ibid.*, p. 298, cf. 1 Cor 8:6). Later: "The one Lord Jesus Christ must not be divided up, as if there was a distinct man and a distinct deity" (*Ibid.*, p. 307). And so on.

<sup>41</sup> *Summa Theologiae* 3.4.2. We find the same point in Bonaventure, *Breviloquium* (Quarrachi, 1891; vol. V, p. 242) 4.2.2.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. *Summa Theologiae* 3.62.5. This too is an idea which goes back to Cyril: "The body was made his very own through a true union and thus served the function of an instrument in order to fulfil those things which it customarily does, sin alone excepted" ("Scholia on the Incarnation of the Only-Begotten," §14).

then it should be clear that no question about the relation between the Word and Jesus can arise, since if you abstracted the Word from Jesus, the latter would simply disappear.

However – here we come to the heart of the matter – Aquinas doesn't merely affirm the union of the two natures in the person of the Son, but interprets that union according to the logic of non-reciprocal relations which define God's relation to creatures in general, as a way of stressing that the line between Creator and creature runs brightly even through the God-man himself. He wonders how humanity and deity relate as they're united in the person of the Son, and in particular whether that union is "something created."<sup>43</sup> An obvious objection Aquinas's own metaphysics seem to pose to that way of putting the matter is that the hypostatic union is clearly true of God the Son, and "nothing in God can be created, because whatever is in God, is God."<sup>44</sup> If the union of the two natures is genuinely something that occurs "in" the second person of the Trinity, how can it be a created event? Doesn't this require that God's being be determined by creation itself?

Aquinas responds to the objection by way of the distinction between logical and real relations: "There is a certain relation which is considered between the divine and human natures, insofar as they coincide in one person, the Son of God," and

Every relation which is considered between God and a creature, is really in the creature, by whose change such a relation comes to be, but it is not really in God, except only according to reason, because it does not come about due to change in God. Thus one ought to say that this union about which we're speaking, is not something real in God, but only according to reason; in the human nature, however, which is a creature, it is something real."<sup>45</sup>

We can gloss this line of thought much as we glossed Aquinas's application of the distinction to creatures more broadly: as creature, Jesus' humanity is entirely determined by its relations to his deity. But Jesus' human actions aren't only (non-competitively) caused by God, but, because of his human nature's assumption by the Son, are themselves God's actions. (The name we give to this qualitative difference between Jesus' actions and mine is "hypostatic union," without exactly knowing what we're describing by it.) Nonetheless, deity remains in the nominative case even with respect to the

<sup>43</sup> *Summa Theologiae* 3.2.7 obj. 1.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Summa Theologiae* 3.2.7.

assumed humanity: even Incarnation adds nothing to the Son, though the Incarnate One is none other than the Son.<sup>46</sup>

This metaphysics buttresses the Chalcedonian tradition's insistence that the two natures remain "unconfused." The Son really undergoes the Passion in his humanity, which, by virtue of being united to the Son, is the humanity of God; but because the Son's love for the Father in their shared Spirit is undiminished even by creaturely sin (diminishment being the only direction of alteration open to it), the divine Son undergoes even the cross "impassibly."<sup>47</sup> But likewise, the logic of non-reciprocal relations also underlies Chalcedon's insistence that the natures are "undivided." Consider the account (to be found in Aquinas, Bonaventure, and Maximus the Confessor, among others) of Jesus' acts of knowing and willing as "theandric": Jesus' divine knowledge and will non-competitively actualize his human faculties, which freely but infallibly cooperate with his deity.<sup>48</sup> (The asymmetry between the LORD's acts and ours, that is, underscores the transcendence which keeps the two natures from tripping over and interfering with one another.) The Creator-creature relation doesn't just run through the God-man; it finds its perfect instance in him.

Aquinas, I noted, sees the barrier of a logical relation of Christ's deity to his humanity as permitting the Son to be the Son with or without the Incarnation. But this is exactly what worries Porter; he sees in it an unacceptable attenuation of the link between the Son and the man, Jesus: "If the Incarnation is merely a way of speaking about changes in human nature with respect to God, then there's nothing to make the Incarnation even conditionally necessary with respect to the particular human being Jesus of Nazareth born of the Virgin Mary."<sup>49</sup> Now, Porter doesn't unpack this expression "conditional necessity," but it is surely opposed to the *unconditional* necessity proper to, for instance, a triangle's interior angles summing

<sup>46</sup> The key is not to prematurely resolve the apparent tension between these two positions, lest we be forced to seize either horn of Arthur Lovejoy's dilemma regarding the "motive" for the act of creation: "There were only two possible consistent views – that of Duns Scotus [inscrutable voluntarism], on the one side, that later represented by Bruno and Spinoza [blind emanationism], on the other" (*The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 81).

<sup>47</sup> Cf. *Summa Theologiae* 3.46.12.

<sup>48</sup> For theandric cooperation with respect to Jesus' knowledge, cf. ST 3.9.1 ad 2; with respect to Jesus' will, cf. ST 3.18.5. Cf. also Bonaventure, *Breviloquium* 4.6-7. For this problem in Maximus, cf. *Opusculum* 6, in Paul Blowers and Robert Louis Wilken (trans.), *The Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ* (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Press), p. 173-74. For helpful discussions of theandric action in Aquinas's thought, see Thomas Joseph White's *Incarnate Lord* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2015), pp. 246-56; in Maximus's thought, see Demetrios Bathrellos, *The Byzantine Christ: Person, Nature, and Will in the Christology of Saint Maximus the Confessor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 163-68.

<sup>49</sup> Porter, "Inheriting Wittgenstein's Augustine," p. 9.

to 180 degrees. We might rather think of conditional necessity as the necessity of faithfulness, the necessity which follows on the fact that God keeps his promises. This is the necessity with which we can say, for instance, that the consecrated Eucharistic elements are Christ's body and blood: Jesus told us they would be, and Jesus doesn't lie. Porter is right that the Incarnation is necessary in this sense: God having ordained from eternity to unite divinity and humanity in the person of the Son, that event necessarily occurs "in the fullness of time" (Gal. 4:4, cf. ST 3.1.3 ad 4). But, so far as I can tell, nothing follows from this about the character of or reasons for that union.

Aquinas also identifies a third kind of necessity, that of fittingness, "sicut equus necessarius est ad iter."<sup>50</sup> Now this isn't necessity at all in that word's colloquial English sense, though it might prove extensionally equivalent with necessity *sensu stricto* if we stipulate that the actor in question – the LORD – infallibly wills to do what's most fitting (this following from his goodness), and is always able to do it (this following from his omnipotence). Aquinas has a great deal to say about the necessity of the Incarnation in this sense, and from many vantages. It was supremely fitting that God become man, Aquinas observes, in agreement with Anselm, because "a mere man could not have satisfied for the whole human race, and God was not bound to satisfy; hence it was necessary for Jesus Christ to be both God and man."<sup>51</sup> It was supremely fitting that God the Son and not the Father or the Spirit become man, Aquinas notes, because "mission in its proper nature implies procession from another, and in divinity, procession is according to origin, as was said above. Hence, as the Father is not from another, in no way is it fitting for him to be sent."<sup>52</sup> It is supremely fitting that the God-man be a Jew because "it would be out of place, to say the least, for God to be born of an idolatrous people that has forsaken him to worship what its own hands have made."<sup>53</sup> We could go on, but it ought to be clear from this that nothing in Aquinas's denial of a real relation of Christ's divinity to his humanity commits him to viewing the Incarnation as an arbitrary or inscrutable gesture.

Porter hasn't yet emptied his clip at this neo-Augustinian position, however. Even if Aquinas can save the Augustinian position from positing a Jesus who is (so to speak) *less than* the Word, can he save it from positing a Word who is (if I may) *more than* Jesus? Porter points out that the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Symbol refers not only

<sup>50</sup> *Summa Theologiae* 3.1.2.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Summa Theologiae* 1.43.4.

<sup>53</sup> Bruce Marshall, "Religion and Election: Aquinas on Natural Law, Judaism, and Salvation in Christ," *Nova et Vetera* 14.1 (2016), pp. 61-125, here p. 113, with copious references to Aquinas's texts.

the economy of salvation but indeed also creation to “unum Dominum Iesum Christum.”<sup>54</sup> Doesn’t the Augustinian habit of referring creation to the divinity of the Son militate against this usage? This is a venerable objection, reminiscent of Rahner’s complaint against Aquinas, “There never should be a treatise on the Trinity in which the doctrine of the ‘missions’ is at best appended only as a relatively unimportant and additional scholion.”<sup>55</sup>

And yet, Aquinas and Augustine alike are happy to speak, with Colossians and the Creed, of Jesus as divine without qualification. For instance, in his commentary on the Apostles’ Creed, Aquinas notes that Photinus “thought that Christ didn’t exist before the blessed virgin, but only began to be when conceived by her. And thus he erred in two things. First, because he did not say that Christ was the true Son of God according to nature; second, because he said that Christ began to exist according to his whole being, while our faith holds that he is Son of God by nature, and that he is from eternity.”<sup>56</sup> And Augustine is similarly bold in his discussion of creation in the very Tractate on John with which we began above: “Do you want to see what sort of counsel of God is our Lord Jesus Christ, that is, the Word of God? Attend to the fabric of this world; see what things are made through the Word, and then you will know what manner of Word he is.”<sup>57</sup> For both theologians, the Son, even as creator, is no other than Jesus, although the act of creation itself is predicable of him, not by virtue of his assumed human nature (which presupposes the act of creation), but by virtue of the his assuming divine nature.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Porter, “Inheriting Wittgenstein’s Augustine,” p. 11, quoting “Concilium Constantinopolitanum I,” in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner and Giuseppe Alberigo (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), p. 24.

<sup>55</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (trans. Catherine LaCugna), p. 40). He’s referring to Aquinas’s failure to mention Jesus until the last question of the so-called “Tractatus de Deo Trino (*Summa Theologiae* 1.27-43). Fully accounting for this apparent bug in Aquinas’s thought would take us too far afield; suffice it to say that it seems to me to have nothing to do with the substance of Aquinas’s Christology, but rather with his determination to adopt a particular “ordo disciplinae” in his treatment of topics (cf. ST proemium). The first part of the *Summa* is about God, both *in se* and as creator; the second part of the *Summa* is about humanity, as the self-directed image bearers of God; and the third part is about the God-man, Jesus, and about his body, the church. Aquinas’s plan of attack requires that the reader have some things to say about the LORD and about human beings before he turns to the human being who is the LORD.

<sup>56</sup> *In Symbolum Apostolorum* (Textum Taurini, 1954; <http://www.corpusthomicum.org/csv.html>) Art. 2, my emphasis.

<sup>57</sup> *In Ev. Ioh. Tract.* 1.9, my emphasis.

<sup>58</sup> For this reason, I can’t see that it does any good for Porter to suggest that “the Word’s becoming flesh is an atemporal fact about God” (“Inheriting Wittgenstein’s Augustine,” p. 11). From the LORD’s standpoint, all that he creates is created a-temporally, isn’t it? And if we take the further step, with Paul Griffiths, of affirming the “folding” of every point of space-time around the flesh of the Incarnate One, so that’s the Incarnation’s

Nonetheless, the communion of attributes is a two-way street, and it entails that Jesus, who is God the Son, is the one through whom all things are created.

### Who Is the LORD? – A Provocation

We can conclude by considering Porter's constructive Christological proposal. He seeks to reinterpret the union of natures in Christ by way of a revised linguistic analogy, modelled on Wittgenstein's philosophy of language. Porter suggests that Scripture's habit – just considered above – of speaking about Jesus as unqualifiedly divine “point[s] us to the possibility of collapsing the corresponding distinction in our picture of language, the same picture that leads Augustine to posit a gap between the pre-linguistic word and the word spoken in a natural language.”<sup>59</sup> (Recall that this is the distinction onto which Augustine mapped the Word and his assumed flesh, with their non-reciprocal relations.<sup>60</sup>) Porter worries, as we've already seen, that this word-concept dualism is implicitly Nestorian, tending to divide what the LORD has joined in Christ; he hopes to articulate an account of language which will avoid this, without in turn “collaps[ing] distinctions where we should find them” – without, that is, falling into a Monophysite Christology.<sup>61</sup>

Wittgenstein opens the *Philosophical Investigations* with some critical reflections on a moment in Augustine's *Confessions*, in which the middle-aged bishop reflects on how he learned to speak as a baby. Augustine observes,

When they called anything by name, and moved the body towards it while they spoke, I saw and gathered that the thing they wished to point out was called by the name they then uttered; and that they did mean this was made plain by the motion of the body, even by the natural language of all nations expressed by the countenance, glance of the eye, movement of other members, and by the sound of the voice indicating the affections of the mind, as it seeks, possesses, rejects, or avoids. So it was that by frequently hearing words, in duly placed sentences, I gradually gathered what things they were the signs of;

“duration” is in some sense equivalent with the duration of creation, we ought to do so as a statement about the relations among creatures (one of one whom is God), not as a statement about the relation between divinity and humanity in Christ. (For this position, cf. Paul Griffiths, *Decreation: The Last Things of All Creatures* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015), §16.)

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>60</sup> “It is by assuming it, not by being consumed into it, that both our word becomes sound and that Word became flesh” (*De Trin.* 15.11.20).

<sup>61</sup> Porter, “Inheriting Wittgenstein's Augustine,” p. 15.

and having formed my mouth to the utterance of these signs, I thereby expressed my will (*voluntates*).<sup>62</sup>

Wittgenstein initially complains that Augustine treats language as though it consisted only of nouns, without reference to the stranger beasts of syncategorematic terms, performatives, and the like.<sup>63</sup> But in Augustine's defense, he's writing here about an infant, for whom language surely *does* consist principally of names. Later on, Wittgenstein makes the more interesting suggestion that "Augustine describes the learning of human language as if the child came into a foreign country and did not understand the language... that is, as if he already had a language, only not this one."<sup>64</sup> That is, it looks as though Augustine thinks that you must already know a language ("mentalese") in order to learn one.<sup>65</sup>

Augustine's point here again seems to me to be more modest, however. Notice that he doesn't attribute thoughts, beliefs, or plans to his infant self, but rather "wills (*voluntates*).<sup>62</sup>" This admits of a homelier interpretation than the one Wittgenstein offers of it: young children want milk (*de re*), even before they have the concepts with which to communicate that desire (*de dicto*). Now Porter doesn't deny this, exactly, but suggests that we account for it without reference to the bulky apparatus of concepts which Augustine takes us to carry around from birth, by seeing words as "grafted" directly onto the experiences (of hunger or pain, say) which supply their truth-conditions. (The parent prompts the infant to say "milk" when she's hungry; this prompting is the graft which tethers language to way of life which is human existence.) Rather than attempting "to fix the meaning of our words by establishing a connection to a referent," we ought to see "that the connection is already there," in the attitudes and ambitions which prompt its application.<sup>66</sup> I take Porter to be expressing the same intuition which, John O'Callaghan observes, prompts "the partisans of the *Linguistic Turn*" to wonder

<sup>62</sup> *Confessions* (trans. J.G. Pilkington; in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, Vol. 1; ed. Philip Schaff; Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887.; <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/110101.htm>), 1.8.13, quoted in *Philosophical Investigations* §1.

<sup>63</sup> *Philosophical Investigations* §1.

<sup>64</sup> *Philosophical Investigations* §32.

<sup>65</sup> As I suggested above, it's not clear to me that this is Augustine's position, but it's worth noting that even philosophers and linguists living after Wittgenstein have found it credible. Particularly worthy of mention in this area are Jerry Fodor's account of "mental language" in *The Language of Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), and Noam Chomsky's proposals to root all natural languages in a "universal grammar" – cf. Noam Chomsky and Robert Berwick, *Why Only Us?: Language and Evolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>66</sup> Porter, "Inheriting Wittgenstein's Augustine," p. 18.



what role do *passiones animae* play in the relation between *words* and *res*? If a *word* can come to mind, and a *res* can come to mind, in order to understand our speech and know what we are talking about, what need have we of an entity *in anima* that also comes to mind occluding itself between the *word* and the *res*? Why can't the word's coming to mind take us directly, without the mediation of a *passio animae*, to the *res* signified, perhaps in a way solely dependent upon social conventions or practices?<sup>67</sup>

There are many difficulties with this kind of position, and it would be absurd to expect either Porter's essay or this response to address them all fully. Nonetheless, I mentioned one above, with regard to the apparent role which (abstract objects called) concepts and propositions are required to play in accounting for the possibility of (intra-linguistic) synonymy, and (inter-linguistic) translatability. (Identity of truth-conditions won't get the job done here, since the truth conditions for "x has a kidney" are the same as for "x has a heart.") Let me add to this one further difficulty for Porter's position. To what do I refer when I say, "Humans laugh"? Not to any particular human, nor to the set of all humans, but rather to the *species-kind* "human," an intelligible form determinable to particulars, one of whose proper accidents is risibility. My word "human" does bear on actual persons (risibility being a proprium of each of us), but obliquely, under the aspect of their universality rather than particularity. It looks, to me at least, as though it is a concept which, like a hidden planet torquing its visible neighbors' orbits, inflects the word's reference and shapes its bearing on the world.

Let me consider a Wittgensteinian rejoinder, which is to say that it's not only the conditions of application which determine the meaning of an utterance, but also the inferences which the speaker or hearer is willing to draw from them.<sup>68</sup> (To have the concept of "humanity" as a species-kind might be to understand that "Humans laugh" wouldn't license the inference, "They might wake up that sleeping baby," but would license the inference, "Humans can make vocal noises.") But a further difficulty is in understanding what the "concepts" in question are if the metaphysics of mind in play doesn't allow for anything other than "a realm of *culture* that rests on, but goes beyond, the

<sup>67</sup> *Thomist Realism and the Linguistic Turn*, pp. 24-5.

<sup>68</sup> Robert Brandom is particularly interesting on this score. "For a response to have *conceptual* content," he suggests, "is just for it to play a role in the *inferential* game of making claims and giving and asking for reasons. To grasp a concept is to have practical mastery over the inferences it is involved in – to know, in the practical sense of being able to distinguish (a kind of know-how), what follows from the applicability of a concept" (*Articulating Reasons* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 48). So, "the parrot" which has been trained to be a reliable differential responder to red objects "does not treat 'that's red' as incompatible with 'that's green,' nor as following from 'that's scarlet' and entailing 'that's colored'" (Ibid.).

background of reliable differential responsive dispositions and their exercise characteristic of merely natural creatures.”<sup>69</sup> We can have a brightline distinction between the “space of reasons” and the “space of nature,” and an organic unfolding of the former from the latter, but it’s not clear to me that it’s possible to have both.<sup>70</sup> Why not rather admit a few “spooky” entities – rational souls, abstract objects called “concepts,” intelligible forms structuring particulars – and call it, with Quine, “swelling ontology to simplify theory”?<sup>71</sup>

The time has come to jump off this train, as it clearly has a good head of steam, and risks carrying us away from the matter at hand, which is Jesus. How does Porter’s attempt at ordinary language theology go? He begins by noting, as a cardinal virtue of his account, that in it “there is no gap between the *verbum mentis* and the *verbum vocis* to be bridged.”<sup>72</sup> In the terms of Augustine’s analogy, this would mean that the metaphysical “gap” between the divine and human nature has been closed – *prima facie*, this is an account which, wherever it’s aiming, is at least temporarily tacking toward Eutyches. That Monophysite moment echoes an earlier statement in Porter’s paper, where, faced with the apparent (if *only* apparent, as I hope I’ve shown) division introduced between the Word and Jesus by the apparatus of non-reciprocal relations, he refuses altogether to apply it to Christ, insisting that the relation of his deity and humanity is fully reciprocal, real on both ends: “The relation God has to Jesus of Nazareth is part of who God is. This is not to say that the divine and human natures are in any way confused, but that the particular relation between the divine nature in the second person of the Trinity and the human nature of Jesus of Nazareth obtains eternally.”<sup>73</sup>

In the first sentence, that misleading Nestorian picture we considered above (in which “Jesus” and “God” are distinct subjects somehow related) reappears briefly, but the second sentence specifies that the relation he’s after is that between the divine and human natures of Christ, which he takes to “part of who God is.”<sup>74</sup> It’s telling that Porter immediately stiff-arms an objection to his confusing the two natures, for this sort of claim has a distinctly Monophysite accent. And the concern motivating the objection isn’t much allayed by his

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>70</sup> For “the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says,” cf. Wilfrid Sellars, “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind,” p. 169. John McDowell juxtaposed this normative state to “the space of nature . . . the realm of law” (*Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. xiv-xv).

<sup>71</sup> W.V.O. Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism,” in *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 45.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., pp. 18-19.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. Cf. also his later comment on “the relation between the divine and human natures of Jesus Christ” (Ibid. p. 19).

further clarification that he understands the relation in question as eternal: as I noted above (n. 58), if the LORD is eternal, then surely *all* of his relations, real or logical, are as well. From the LORD's standpoint, creation as a whole obtains eternally; time obtains only from the creaturely vantage, the vantage of change and motion.

We find further reason to read Porter *ad Eutychen* in the context which surround this quotation, where he suggests that the Incarnation ought to be thought out in terms of the "intra-trinitarian relations."<sup>75</sup> Now as we saw above (cf. n. 30), the intra-Trinitarian relations, for Augustine and for his heirs, are just as fully identical with the divine essence as is a predicate of quality such as "justice," which in a creature would be an accident, but which divine simplicity renders convertible with the Godhead, with the difference that these relations retain their peculiarly extroverted orientation to another than their bearer. To be the Father is to be identical with the life that the LORD is, with the qualification that it is a way of being (*tropos hyparxeōs*) that life which bears an irreducible reference to another – the Son – who is another way of being that life. Now what would it mean to fold Christ's human nature into those intra-Trinitarian "subsistent relations," except to render it divine, and that not by grace but by nature? (It's no accident that Monophysitism is associated with accounts of Christ's "heavenly flesh" as eternally pre-existing his conception by Mary.<sup>76</sup>)

The Monophysite reading of the above passage is strengthened by Porter's concluding suggestion "that 'And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us' (Jn 1:14 RSV) is the same event, the bringing into being all that is from nothing that occurs with the LORD's first utterance, 'Let there be light' (Gn 1:3 RSV)."<sup>77</sup> Does this mean that creation through the Word is true, not only "secundum deitatem," but equally "secundum carnem"? He goes on to add, however, "The relations of the three persons *ad intra* which obtain in eternity are logically (but not temporally) prior to the grafting of the Word onto creation in the Incarnation."<sup>78</sup> True enough, but one wonders where Augustine or his heirs taught that the eternal life of the Trinity is temporal *at all*, much less "temporally prior" to the Incarnation.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Stephen Webb, who endorsed this eccentric view, summarizes it as follows: the Monophysites "concluded that [Jesus'] human nature must have also been divine in some way. Moreover, he must have received all that he has from the Father, *so that even his human nature was an implication of the Trinitarian relations*. The best way to express all of this, at least for some Monophysites, was to say that he brought his human nature with him when he came down from heaven" (*Jesus Christ, Eternal God: Heavenly Flesh and the Metaphysics of Matter* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 102, my emphasis).

<sup>77</sup> Porter, "Inheriting Wittgenstein's Augustine," p. 19.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

Porter's telescoping of the Son's procession and mission is reminiscent of Robert Jenson's striking claim, "To reclaim Hegel's truth for the gospel, we need only a small but drastic amendment: Absolute Consciousness finds its own meaning and self in the *one* historical object, Jesus, and *so* posits Jesus' fellows as its fellows and Jesus' world as its world."<sup>79</sup> The act by which the Father conceives his perfect Image is the Incarnation, and by extension, the creation of the world which is prepared for Christ, like a setting for a jewel. Unfortunately, as David Hart lamented, Hegel's "system is too well thought out, and one step toward it is complete capitulation."<sup>80</sup> Hart concludes that Jenson, like Hegel, must "posit not only the necessity of evil, but indeed the necessity of the actual history of evil."<sup>81</sup> Collapsing the LORD's transcendence of his creatures even just in the case of Christ's humanity is a bit like cutting a 5' × 5' hole in the Hoover Dam, all the while protesting that most of the structure is still there: inevitably, if the LORD is really related to any creature, he's really related to all of them, which means conditioned by all of them, gulags and gas chambers and all.

Could God the Son have been begotten of the Father without being Incarnate? (If Maximus the Confessor is right about the reason for the Incarnation, then perhaps this is equivalent to asking if God could be God even without creation.<sup>82</sup>) Porter's protests of the logical priority of Christ's divinity to his humanity notwithstanding, the logic of his essay would suggest that Incarnation is part of what it is for the Son to be Son. And what is this if not a confusion of deity with humanity? The Chalcedonian tradition in Christology, by contrast, developed with an eye to achieving precisely the result Porter aimed

<sup>79</sup> Robert Jenson, "The Holy Spirit," in Robert Jenson & Carl Braaten (eds.), *Christian Dogmatics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), vol. 2, p. 169.

<sup>80</sup> *The Beauty of the Infinite*, p. 163.

<sup>81</sup> "Sin and evil belong to God's intent precisely – but *only* – as they do appear in Christ's victory over them" (*Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 73). To be fair, Jenson goes on to acknowledge, "Presumably God could have been himself on different terms . . . but, of this possibility, we can assert only the sheer contrafactual" (*Systematic Theology*, v. 1, p. 65). Of this God, however, we presumably know, and can know, nothing, not even that he is good.

<sup>82</sup> Aquinas, of course, affirms the possibility of sinless worlds in which the Son was not incarnate, cf. *Summa Theologiae* 3.1.3. This is by far the majority view in the theological tradition; it's mistaken if you take it that, as Maximus the Confessor put it, "This mystery [of the Incarnation] is the preconceived goal for which everything exists, but which itself exists on account of nothing" (*Ad Thalassium* 60, in Paul Blowers & Robert Louis Wilken (eds.), *The Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ* (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Press, 2003), p. 124). Is this what St. Paul had in mind in saying, "He is before all things"? (cf. Col. 2:15). We ought to keep in mind that saying that every possible world includes Christ Incarnate is still not as strong a metaphysical claim as saying that there *must* be some actual world in which Christ is incarnate, at least if it's possible for no possible (created) world to be actual.

at, namely, to affirm that Jesus is God the Son made flesh, without introducing either confusion or division between his divinity and humanity.

Porter's essay in Christology, like Jenson's theology as a whole, is a twofold provocation: he forces his readers to look back to Christ, and to see him in a new and strange light. Hart distilled Jenson's theological achievement into the following insight:

There is nothing arbitrary or accidental in the relation of the identity of Jesus of Nazareth to that of the eternal Logos. Jesus is not an avatar of the Logos, a mask the Son assumes in a transient or extrinsic fashion, or a part he plays in some grand cosmic charade. When God becomes man, this is the man He becomes—and there can be no other.<sup>83</sup>

Porter's essay is eagled-eyed in its gazing upon this burning mystery, God incarnate. The intensity of that stare cannot but provoke his readers to turn their attention to Christ as well, and for this, we ought to be grateful. He, as much as Augustine or Aquinas, is attempting to express a truth before which we can only stammer, a reality with which we cannot wrestle without receiving a wound – but also a blessing.

*Brendan Case*  
*Duke Divinity School*

*brendan.case@duke.edu*

<sup>83</sup> David Hart, "The Lively God of Robert Jenson," *First Things* October 2005. <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2005/10/the-lively-god-of-robert-jenson> (Accessed 4/12/18).