

A Shadow Cannot Feel Pain: Meditations on the Human Emotions & Suffering of Christ

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ABSTRACT

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The Western world is currently undergoing a mass destigmatization regarding the issues of mental health - societal ideas of masculinity and femininity, definitions of weakness, the blemish of seeking help, and the complexities of personal identity are being tossed on their heads in favour of a push toward acceptance and personal liberation, with help at the ready. With that in mind, this thesis argues that the character of Jesus Christ can be recontextualized through the example of his own mental health struggles as a figure by which to model oneself in an effort to navigate the tumults of suffering. The patristic theologian, Cyril of Alexandria, in response to the Nestorian Controversy, galvanizes the necessary human nature of Christ - a nature that is witnessed most keenly in the biblical scene of the Garden of Gethsemane, where Christ underwent emotions of doubt, fear, and temptation. Cyril's own ideas on an emotional human Christ, an individual that bore the full extent of the human soul, can be further explicated by the 19th century Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard. Though Kierkegaard doesn't single-out Cyril, nor indeed Christ, his explorations into the liberational components of anxiety illuminate how Christ's anxiety, as well as our own, might serve as an orientation toward faith. More contemporary theologians, such as Bernard Lonergan and John D. Caputo, understand this liberation as a way in which to extract and adjoin meaning to that faith. By witnessing this process in Jesus: an understanding of his human nature, anxiety leading to faith, and the appearance of meaning and purpose, the individual might then use the model of Christ, a contemporary *imitatio christi*, as a way to understand, witness, and assign meaning to their own suffering.

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It may just as well be the case for Jesus when he was contemplating his fate in Gethsemane as it may be for the person who is suffering alone and faces potential death...Whoever suffers without reason always feels at first that he is forsaken by God and all good things. Whoever cries to God in this suffering, joins fundamentally in the death-cry of Jesus...He cries with the abandoned Son to the Father, and the Spirit intercedes for him with groanings.

- Jan-Olav Henriksen and Karl Olav Sandnes, "The Vulnerable Human and the Absent God"

Introduction

The question of this thesis is born out of the current "age of anxiety" that we humans collectively face and asks, succinctly: who can Jesus be for me? Less succinctly, what I have tried to uncover is how appropriating the human and suffering categories of the character of Jesus, particularly those of an emotional nature, might aid adherents and seculars alike in navigating the trenches of emotional disturbance. That is to say, we are often presented with the idea of a suffering Christ atop the cross, covered with blood and bruises - an image that has been utilized for centuries as a means of meditating on the relative powers of *compassion*¹ - but how are we to relate to this pain of Christ contemporaneously? In affluent societies, physical suffering is not a phenomena we encounter nearly as much as one might in the past but we do suffer in the mind; anxiety, depression, loneliness, and all manners of psychological afflictions are being pushed to the forefront of concern. We see many examples of this around the world; the rise of antidepressant use in North America, the appearance of the hikikomori in Japan, and how, in the UK in 2018, there was the creation of entirely new parliamentary position, the Minister of Loneliness, to combat this rising issue. Can coming to an understand of Jesus' own emotional sufferings, and the ways in which he comes to understand and accept them himself, create for us an example - a new form of *imitatio christi* - by which we can reconcile with our own issues of depression, loneliness, and anxiety? I believe that the person of Christ can stand as such an exemplar in approaching these issues and this thesis stands as an investigation into why and how this is possible.

In order to carry-out this investigation I have made particular methodological choices; this paper is not concerned with a historical Jesus, though of course elements of history persist in the understanding of the narrative as a whole: Jesus being crucified (a distinctly Roman-era punishment), the reception of the suffering of Christ through the ages (Cyril to Caputo), etc. What this paper attempts, instead, is to discover the mystery of the humanity of Jesus in theological and philosophical terms in order to create a framework by which to transfer the idea of compassionate suffering from the physical to the emotional. What I have endeavoured to show is that: Christ suffered in his humanity (both physically and emotionally), what that humanity entails, how both this humanity and anxiety have been understood philosophically through time, and what application this understanding might now have when viewing the figure of Christ as a proxy for our own suffering.

1 In the definitive sense of the word compassion; "to suffer with."

I have put the word "Meditations" in the title of this thesis as it denotes *some* thoughts, not all of post-Christ history, on the subject of the person of Christ and the reception and understanding of (His) suffering. I have followed the great-thinkers method in my line of inquiry, whose thoughts these meditations hinge on to shed light on the particular issues the thesis tackles. This paper traces a line of inquiry but forges its own path in dealing with what is essentially the mystery of the humanity of Christ. To understand Christ in his humanity an initial exploration of what is meant by this categorization is needed; here I employ the work of 4th century theologian, Cyril of Alexandria. Cyril, in his works *On the Unity of Christ* and *Three Christological Treatises*, was steadfast that Christ must be viewed as fully human in one aspect of the Trinitarian whole whilst maintaining that He was also still fully divine. The mysteries of the Trinity aside, what is paramount for this thesis is Cyril's insistence that, as fully human, Christ possessed a human soul and was therefore subject to all those things to which any human soul was subject; including pain, anger, temptation, anxiety, and loneliness. Cyril provides a vantage point from which to depart - Jesus must be understood as a man. Once this is established we can establish too that he suffered as a man in his physical form, but emotionally as well; as a man he wept, he was overcome by anxiety, and he was subject to temptation.

Once an understanding of the humanity of Christ is established I move to take a closer look at anxiety in particular. Anxiety in Christ is demonstrated in various locations throughout the Gospels but there is no better example than in the Garden of Gethsemane. I chose to pay close attention to the Gethsemane scene as it is here we see Jesus at his most vulnerable, his most lost, and witness, in the midst of his anxiety, his emotional plea to be spared of his heavenly fate. In understanding how we are to interpret this scene I have turned to the 19th century Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard. In particular I look at Kierkegaard's work, *The Concept of Anxiety*, in which the author reorients the idea of anxiety as a necessary form of encountering the human condition as a prospect for freedom. For Kierkegaard, anxiety is an essential component of faith as it is the radical choosing of faith (in spite of circumstances that would seemingly negate this faith) which constitute the only genuine form of faith. The anxiety, for Kierkegaard, is the choosing in the face of all these freedoms, all available options; it is not to be seen as an affliction to be remedied, but a motivator to harness freedom into genuine free will and choice. Why Kierkegaard's ideas seem so poignant to this thesis is that he both understands that faith is separate from belief; where belief is a condition but faith is an activity, and that anxiety is an essential component in the participation of faith; both of these ideas can be seen to be enacted in the Garden scene as well as being actively applicable in the imitation of Christ.

Once I establish both the humanity of Christ, as seen primarily through the lens of Cyril of Alexandria, and how anxiety relates to faith, through Kierkegaard, the question becomes one of meaning; in particular, how can meaning be transferred from individual to individual, epoch to epoch? How can Christ's emotional sufferings hold meaning to a person living in today's world? To answer this I have utilized the work of two (relatively) contemporary theologians/philosophers: the 20th century Jesuit, Bernard Lonergan, and the 21st century scholar, John D. Caputo. Lonergan allows for what might be the most useful concept regarding meaning - that, throughout time, meaning will inevitably change in accordance to the audience for which the meaning is being interpreted, though the intention of the original meaning may remain the same. It would be a hard task for someone in 19th century to derive from the Gospels the same meaning as someone from the 10th century; there are linguistic differences, transmission changes, scribal errors, etc. More importantly, there is an entire shift in understanding from a person in the 10th to the 19th centuries; between them lay a history of war, scholarship, science, and literature that inevitably changes the way in which one interprets with respect to the other. Lonergan allows for this change in meaning with the understanding that each era, each

group of people, and even every particular person, will interpret and derive meaning on their own basis according to their needs. Even in the individual, meaning will change and evolve as insights change and evolve. This is not to say that there can be no shared meaning(s), but that even in shared meanings individuals will have their own take on what is shared. Similarly, the postmodernist, John D. Caputo, puts forth the idea that meaning is constructed via the insights that have come to inform a meaning but that essentially this meaning is deconstructable; it can be torn asunder, reformulated in light of new revelations, re-contextualized, and ultimately be recreated in an entirely new form. In light of this, Caputo would urge us to be ceaseless in the destruction and reconstruction of meaning so that it need not be static and instead allow meaning to evolve and change alongside the necessary evolutions and changes in society, culture, history, and ourselves.

When we allow that meaning is, as Lonergan and Caputo might agree on, developmental, tangible, and (certainly to some degree) individual, we can then see how we might come to understand the application of an *imitatio christi* for the current age, being also the attempt of this paper: to understand the humanity of Christ, the anxiety inherent in that life (and our own), the ability to view anxiety as integral to faith, and the manner in which to cultivate that faith through an imitation of Christ through the development and attribution of meaning. I believe that an understanding of this would be a great benefit in transposing the resource of Christ to a living, breathing, audience and is what the postmodernists Henricksen and Sandnes insist, stating that "when the human being seeks herself in an unfulfilled destiny while realizing that this cannot be wholly appropriated or fulfilled at present, this paves the way for living here and now in a way that recognizes the vulnerability of both others and oneself."²

2 Jan-Olav Henricksen and Karl Olav Sandnes, "The Vulnerable Human and the Absent God: The Stories about Gethsemane as a Possible Source for Theological Anthropology," *Kerygma Und Dogma* 64, no. 3 (July 2018): 173.

1: The Characterization of a Human Jesus

This first section delves into the idea of Jesus as a human person and in particular highlights the human emotions of Jesus - explicit, perceived, and intuited - which were necessarily felt in his human self. To do this I have primarily examined the works of the 4th century patristic theologian, Cyril of Alexandria. Cyril provides a particularly straight-forward approach to how the humanity of Christ is to be understood as part of an overall Christology. Furthermore, as this thesis especially examines how the suffering emotions of Jesus; fear, anxiety, trepidation, etc., are, alongside the physical, indicative of a parallel emotional passion, time is spent on identifying when and why these emotions appear in Jesus. Finally, we look at how these emotions are to be understood as a greater indication and integral part of the salvific mission of Christ.

Cyril of Alexandria & his Christology

Saint Cyril was a theologian writing mainly in the late 4th and 5th centuries in what is modern-day Egypt in the city of Alexandria, which John Anthony McGuckin states was “a Christian city that had (and was to continue to have) a great and honourable roll of martyrs, holy monks, and doctors of the church to ennoble its annals” and that “with the exception of St Athanasius it had no one as remarkable as St Cyril occupying the episcopal throne.”³ Cyril is perhaps most known for his involvement in the Christological controversies that emerged during his tenure, famously debating these issues with his theological rival, Nestorius, who was for some time the Patriarch of Constantinople. Cyril had been raised to be very educated in the popular schooling of the time, such as grammar and rhetoric, as well as in the popular theology of the time, especially that of Alexandrian theologians such as Origen and Athanasius. Cyril's uncle on his mother's side, Theophilus, had been Patriarch of Alexandria – a seat which Cyril himself was appointed to upon the death of Theophilus in 412 CE. It was from this seat that Cyril would cement his reputation through his treatises on Mariology, Christology, homilies and letters, and battled the heresy he saw rising in the rival Antioch school.

What is most important in understanding the historical context of Cyril is that he is living in Alexandria at a time of important intellectual developments punctuated by names that were to remain integral to the theological history of Christianity. John Anthony McGuckin says, “together with Origen and Athanasius, Cyril stands as one of the greatest theologians of the Alexandrian Church, and like his other two compatriots, one of the greatest theologians of the Universal Church's history.”⁴ Utmost in importance in the intellectual milieu of Alexandria was the advent of Neoplatonism. Unlike the writings of Aristotle, Plato's writings had survived thanks mostly to a series of philosophers who carried on the Platonic tradition. Alexandria was one of the key hot-spots of this tradition and home to

3 John Anthony McGuckin, Introduction to *On the Unity of Christ*, by Cyril of Alexandria (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995), 31.

4 Ibid, 32.

much Neoplatonic thought. Theology was not immune to this influence and its prevalence in the Alexandrian arena could already be felt strongly in the writings of Origen. Neoplatonism gave to theologians such as Origen and Cyril a template by which to interpret, create, and mold theological concepts. If something was not inherently intelligible directly from scripture, a Platonic interpretation or classification might aid in making it more comprehensible. At this time we witness a great amount of Neoplatonic application on scriptural ideas as well as the influence of Plato's method of understanding through dialogue. Much of Cyril's own writing, most notably *Three Christological Treatises*, will implement the Socratic dialogue style of Plato and later Neoplatonic writers. While it may seem integral to theology now, it is important to understand the impact that Neoplatonic thought had on the development of early christian theology in the Latin West, of which Cyril remains a pillar. That being said, as Roy Kearsley points out in "The Impact of Greek Concepts of God on the Christology of Cyril of Alexandria," in regards to the in-vogue ideas of Plato, "at most Cyril 'transposes' Neoplatonism rather than replicates it"⁵ and that, while it was certainly utilized by the theologian, "an analysis of the impact of certain aspects of Platonist theology on Cyril reveals that Christian faith did not enfold philosophy within itself without a modifying process."⁶

Cyril was embroiled in a number of controversies during his career and it is no surprise that much of his theological writing takes, at varying times, either an apologetic or argumentative tone. The controversy for which he most famous is between him and Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople. The controversy surrounded the idea of Mary, the mother of Jesus, being *theotokos* or "God-bearer" and while the nature of Mary was an important element to the controversy, in the end the dispute boiled down to the question of Christ's humanity; simply put for now, Nestorius didn't view Christ's human nature as truly human and therefore capable of suffering. Cyril on the other hand defended the necessity of Christ's having a fully human nature that was capable of feeling pain. In his "Introduction" to *Three Christological Treatises*, Daniel King says that "Cyril's attack revolves around the argument from soteriology – that is, if Christ only 'seemed' to be the Word of God incarnate, then '[t]he fact of his being 'with us' would mean nothing at all'. For salvation to be real, and for the Eucharist to be a genuine channel of redemption, all the sufferings of Christ must also be real and physical."⁷ In the end, Cyril's side won-out in the controversy and what we are left with is not only a victor, but spoils for ourselves: in the process of arguing his point Cyril was, naturally, forced to explicate his Christological points in a number of writings and while these treatises were initially intended to counter Nestorian heresy, they are now viewed as some of the most important theological writings in the Christological canon.

Speaking of the Christology of Cyril of Alexandria, John Anthony McGuckin says that "for Cyril the primary message of the incarnation was not about the discrete relationship of God and man, but nothing less than the complete reconciliation of God and man in Jesus" and that the Church Father "insisted that the incarnation is not for the sake of God, but for the redemption of the human race."⁸ This reconciliation was not, however, an amalgamation, inhabitation, nor mixture – Jesus Christ was not a composite character of divinity and humanity but instead, in a celestial "Schrodinger's cat," he must be viewed as both fully human and fully divine, both "activities" working in tandem. Moreover, these two natures of Jesus Christ were not in a tension but a cooperation as McGuckin notes that "for

5 Roy Kearsley, "The Impact of Greek Concepts of God on the Christology of Cyril of Alexandria," *Tyndale Bulletin* 43, no. 2 (November 1992): 321.

6 *Ibid.*, 328.

7 Daniel King, Introduction to *Three Christological Treatises*, by Cyril of Alexandria (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2014), 11.

8 McGuckin, 34.

Cyril...the deity and humanity were not like two weights on a pair of scales, poised in an uneasy balance in Christ; rather the one was nurturing the matrix of the other.”⁹

Speaking particularly on the human nature of Christ, Cyril is quite clear:

He did not change himself into flesh; he did not endure any mixture or blending, or anything else of this kind. But he submitted himself to being emptied...and did not disdain the poverty of human nature. As God wished to make that flesh which was held in the grip of sin and death evidently superior to sin and death. He made his very own, and not soulless as some have said, but rather animated with a rational soul, and thus he restored flesh to what it was in the beginning.¹⁰

The above quote, from Cyril's *On the Unity of Christ*, implores the reader to understand that Jesus is indeed fully human, a humanity which is no shroud, which the author builds on in *Three Christological Treatises* when he says of Jesus that “he suffered hunger, that he bore the trials of extensive travel, that he experienced violence and fear, grief and agony.”¹¹ Cyril asserts even the possessing of a human soul and says that “the body which he was united to himself was endowed with a rational soul, for the Word, who is God, would hardly neglect our finer part, the soul, and have regard only for the earthly body.”¹² He was subject to all that any other human entity was subject to, including physical and emotional pain. Indeed, Cyril goes as far as to say that he is vulnerable even to death and sin. That being said, while he retains the potentiality to sin, Jesus is incorruptible, not because of the precondition of divinity but due to the perfection of his humanity, as to be perfectly human is to be sinless. Christ's vulnerability to death in his mortal form is realized, as we know, at the end of his mission on the cross in Golgotha.

Cyril attempts to further explore how the two natures of Christ, human and divine, are realized concurrently while admitting that the mystery of just how this is possible remains in the spectre of God, saying that the “Godhead is one thing, and manhood is another thing, considered in the perspective of their respective and intrinsic beings, but in the case of Christ they came together in a mysterious and incomprehensible union without confusion or change.”¹³ Jesus can be both God and man because the Word wills that this be so and the mystery of the Word is beyond human understanding and we are to accept that “he is paradoxically bound together out of two complete elements, namely, humanity and divinity, into a single individual being;”¹⁴ the importance laying in the Word's willingness to submit to the life of the flesh as human and undergo all that humanity entails as “if he has not become man, and had not been born of a woman according to the flesh, then we ought to chase away all human characteristics from him.”¹⁵ Instead, by the Word's willingness to become human and eventually take on the sins of humanity, “He would undo our abandonment by his obedience and complete submission.”¹⁶ Eventually, the importance of the willingness and necessity of the Word becoming flesh will be revealed as integral to the soteriological mission of Christ.

9 Ibid, 37.

10 Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Unity of Christ* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995), 54-55.

11 Cyril of Alexandria, *Three Christological Treatises* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2014), 56.

12 Cyril, *On the Unity*, 64

13 Ibid, 77.

14 Cyril, *Three Treatises*, 59.

15 Cyril, *On the Unity*, 100.

16 Ibid, 105.

For Cyril, none of this is to say that Jesus was not special in his humanity – in fact he was the perfection of humanhood. As Cynthia Peters Anderson notes in “Deification in the Early Church and Cyril of Alexandria,” Jesus was a divine form of humanity – not because of the divinity innate in his other, divine, form but because he was the perfect, sinless, form of a human who was able to make holy himself that human form, saying “the key here in Cyril's understanding is that, as the Incarnate Word, Jesus sanctifies his own humanity.”¹⁷ Cyril states of Christ that “he was not 'merely' human”¹⁸ but instead was “above humanity since he is by nature God and Son, but at the same time the fact that he saw fit to bring himself down to the human level does him no dishonor” and that it was “for humanity's sake that he called himself inferior, even though he was not actually lesser than the Father since he is the same in terms of substance and every way his equal.”¹⁹ What Cyril is pointing to is that the Godhead is fully human in his humanity, but that this humanity itself, due to the nature of its celestial incarnation, is still the product of a divine initiative and makes Jesus special in his humanity, of which he is fully immersed. Peters, once again, elaborates on how Cyril viewed the special status of Jesus' humanity through hypostatic union in saying:

A key feature of Cyril's Christology is its insistence on the transformation of humanity in Christ. In the incarnation, both divinity and humanity are united without either being diminished, but the Logos infuses the humanity with the glory and power of his own divine nature. While there is no change in the humanity in a way that makes it divine or less than human, there is a transformation of it into something more fully human than it was.²⁰

Jesus is human, but he is divinely human, “not a man, but God made man”²¹ and due to the triadic nature of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and despite his full humanity, the “Son is not something foreign to the Father and the Spirit, and the activities of the Trinity are neither separate nor individual. Rather, any activity that is described in the Scriptures as belonging to one of the concrete existences belongs to the Trinity as a whole”²² and in this way the “Word's 'becoming' flesh is really a 'tabernacling' in the flesh.”²³ That is to say, while Jesus was fully human, the activity of that humanity is not unknown to the other parts of the Trinity and, indeed, is still acting in intention and deed in tandem with a Trinitarian purpose.

Doubt & Fear

If we are to accept Cyril's Christological premises, that Jesus was fully human in his human nature and possessed a human soul, we must necessarily also accept that he possessed those intellectual and emotional faculties common to humans; we understand and are told that he felt both joy and pain in his humanity. Of particular importance to this thesis are those emotions of Christ that might be viewed as contributing to the overall suffering he endured in his soteriological mission and death, particularly doubt and fear, but also temptation, angst, anger, disillusionment, and self-pity; the goal of which is to understand the reconciliation of the divine plan of God within Jesus' own humanity and his emotional

17 Cynthia Peters Anderson, *Reclaiming Participation: Christ as God's Life for All* (Minneapolis, MN: Ausberg Fortress Press, 2014), 43.

18 Cyril, *Three Treatises*, 67.

19 Ibid, 63.

20 Peters, 44.

21 Ibid, 55.

22 Cyril, *Three Treatises*, 160-61.

23 Ibid, 133.

reactions to this mission. Speaking of Cyril's views on what affect the pressing nature of the human condition had on Jesus, John Anthony McGuckin states that “in the incarnation Cyril sees the eternal God directly experiencing suffering and death – insofar as like other men he too is brought under the terms of human lifeform”²⁴ - terms that would, no doubt, not only include those physical sufferings of Jesus but the emotional sufferings as well. As Roy Kearsely notes in examining Cyril's works, the patristic author “seems to accept the idea of suffering in Christ's human soul.”²⁵

Jesus undoubtedly felt the human emotions of doubt and fear. This is evidenced scripturally on many occasions:

- “In his anguish he prayed even more earnestly, and his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood,” Luke 22:44
- “Jesus said to them, 'I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake,'" Mark 14:34
- “For the high priest we have is not incapable of feeling our weaknesses with us, but has been put to the test in exactly the same way as ourselves, apart from sin.,” Hebrews 4:15
- “Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection: for the joy which lay ahead of him, he endured the cross, disregarding the shame of it, and has taken his seat at the right of God's throne,” Hebrews 12:2
- “And going on a little further he fell on his face and prayed. 'My Father,' he said, 'if it is possible, let this cup pass by me. Nevertheless, let it be as you, not I, would have it',” Matthew 26:39

The above scriptural passages evidence both that Jesus experienced emotional suffering and that his human life followed a trajectory that God the Father willed and, therefore, that it would be safe to assume that the divine will of Jesus, to some degree, knew beforehand the fate that awaited him. However, while Jesus had a divine nature, he had a human nature as well and as he performed miracles and preached he also struggled in accepting his fate. There are clear signs of an internal battle between the two wills of Jesus evidenced most keenly in his apprehension to die, despite knowledge of its necessity in carrying out the fulfillment of God's promise to humanity. This is, perhaps, the clearest indication of the existence of a human will in Jesus. If he had been a solely divine being there would be no apprehension, simply an unquestioned carrying-out of celestial duties. Instead he was a divine being who, of his own accord, took up the mantle of being human and in doing so necessarily adopted all that it was to be human; Cyril says, in *On the Unity of Christ*, that “just as we say that the flesh became his very own, in the same way the weakness of that flesh became his very own in an economic appropriation according to the terms of unification.”²⁶

Warren J. Smith says, in his article “Suffering Impassibly,” that “when the Word became flesh taking a body for his very own, he experienced, along with the infirmities of embodiment, the full

24 McGuckin, 44.

25 Kearsley, 324.

26 Cyril, *On the Unity*, 107.

range of human emotions which accompany our mortal nature, such as fear and timidity.”²⁷ If then Jesus took up the weakness of flesh that it is to be human, it is understood that he also took up those weaknesses of emotion and that, despite possible indications of a divine mission within himself, he still experienced trepidation at such a mission. It must be posited that he was at times afraid, unsure, or even resentful of the turmoil he was to endure and resentment as well for the loss of a life he would not carry-on living. We can postulate that since there were duelling impulses within Jesus, oscillating between the mission of his fate and the desire to live, Jesus as man did not want to die. In examining whether Jesus was what the author deems a “martyr-prophet” in the Jewish tradition, Paul E. Davies says,

Within the larger framework of a suffering prophet's career he could still hope to see some different outcome, some other issue and way of fulfillment of this destiny. Jesus did not control the forces of opposition that occasioned his suffering, and it follows that the outcome remained uncertain almost to the end.²⁸

Jesus had a fate, a divine plan perhaps not fully revealed to him, but this fate was hard for the human will to accept. This is the root of the suffering of Jesus; the internal battle to reconcile these two wills that were at times in harmony and at other times in discord. In essence, when Jesus asks for the “cup to be taken from him” he is saying “must this really have to happen to me?” Jesus' hesitation is a particularly striking flash of the human condition in the saviour-to-be. And the negotiation is reminiscent of the quasi-internal dialogue any individual might undergo in accepting the difficulties of life. It is also a clear indication of doubt and fear; doubt in his ability to complete his mission and fear of the inevitable conclusion of such a mission. Rachel Erdman states, “Christ did not suffer any punishment that every other human does not suffer.”²⁹ What this points to is that Jesus shares in the undesirable aspects of humanity with the rest of humanity while also accepting His fate on our behalf and, what's more, is placed as a guide for such occasions when we may question our own fates. Humanity is there with Jesus as he is “sent into the darkness, conflict, evil, suffering, and death” and we are left to ask “what does it mean to be sent into darkness like him?”³⁰

Cyril would insist that in moments of such indecision, fear, and doubt, we are evidencing the sheer human nature of Christ in its most obvious form, as it would never be that God could doubt or fear His own salvific mission; Cyril states that “if it was the Word of God who cried, 'Father, if possible, let this cup pass from me,' then in the first place he is not of one mind with the Father, and, further, he is wrong to pray against drinking the cup, even though he knows full well that his Passion is going to be the world's salvation. He infers, then, that these sayings were not made by God the Word.”³¹ It is even so that Jesus himself must take special care to interpret the emotions he is feeling in order to understand what is of and from God and what is of his own human nature. This makes the element of doubt even more profound and, like the other characteristics of Christ's human nature, further indicates the full indwelling of humanity in Jesus – an omniscient God would not question his own divine mission, nor fear it, but an ordinary man would. Warren J. Smith, in decoding Cyril on this idea, says that in “commenting on Jesus' request to have this cup taken from him, Cyril observes that

27 J. Warren Smith, “Suffering Impassibly: Christ's Passion in Cyril of Alexandria's Soteriology,” *Pro Ecclesia* 11, no. 4 (Fall 2002): 468.

28 Paul E. Davies, “Did Jesus Die as a Martyr-Prophet,” *Biblical Research* 19 (1974), 46.

29 Rachel Erdman, “Sacrifice as Satisfaction, Not Substitution: Atonement in the Summa Theologiae,” *Anglican Theological Review* 96, no. 3 (Sum 2014), 467.

30 David Ford. “Who Is Jesus Now?: Maxims and Surprises.” *Anglican Theological Review* 101, no. 2 (Spr 2019): 223.

31 Cyril, *Three Treatises*, 104.

the Word who is immortal, incorruptible, and life itself cannot 'cower before death.' Yet by virtue of the hypostatic union he experiences all things proper to the flesh, including its revulsion at the threat of death. Thus in his humanity Jesus cowers before death."³²

This idea of Christ's humanity and death is taken up in the fictional novel *The Last Temptation of Christ* by Nikos Kazantzakis and, likewise, the film based on the story. The final temptation that the book alludes to displays a fictional account of Jesus being spared his life on the cross by who he believes to be an angel of God but is, in fact, Satan. He lives a full life and has wives and children but still in the end, when the truth of the trick is revealed, Jesus begs to be placed back as the sacrifice and eventually fulfills his divine destiny. The importance of Kazantzakis' story is that it explores the emotional temptation that Jesus undoubtedly felt which was the impetus for his asking God to spare him. While the book decides to interpret the wavering of Jesus in his doubt as a diabolic trick, it displays a truly human side to Jesus that is uniquely relatable and can inform a modern Christology from the perspective of temptation. A question that might remain is how then can Jesus have been tempted but that temptation not in itself be a sin? John Knox explains it as follows, "Jesus, when he was tempted did not *consent* to sin, did not succumb to its enticements. A question for another study might be whether temptation can be real if sin itself is not in some sense or measure already present?" and "can we, then, think of Jesus as tempted – and moreover tempted in all respects as we are – and yet as not knowing from within the existential meaning of human sinfulness?"³³

Christopher A. Beeley, in "Christ and Human Flourishing in Patristic Theology," notes that the scriptures contain "both divine and human statements about Christ...[and]...make divine statements about the human Jesus and human statements about the divine Son of God"³⁴ and that Christ possesses "human choice and self-determination."³⁵ Therefore, Jesus in his human form was granted the same type of free-will that God has granted to all beings. Daniel A. Keating seconds this assertion in the thoughts of Cyril, saying that "in a very telling moment Cyril states that if the Son does not possess the Spirit essentially, then he could at any time reject sanctification, just as we can."³⁶ With this free-will, however, comes the battle ground of human emotion, from which Jesus was not spared. This anxiety had a direct correlation to his ministry and relationships with others – we evidence examples of Jesus rebuking his disciples harshly or growing angry toward the doubtful – and, undoubtedly, this anxiety also effected his personal mood, mental health, and well-being. Thomas Cattoi says that this is evidenced in the Garden of Gethsemane;³⁷ speaking of both Jesus in particular and the mental instability of man in general, Cattoi notes that "he does not become fully irrational, but his intellectual abilities are weakened. In a similar way, our will is weakened, so that the flesh is now able to force a reluctant mind to turn away from what is good."³⁸ That being said, Jesus being divinely and perfectly human, is (while not being unaffected by these fears, doubts, and temptations) not affected to the same degree as a normal human would be by fear, doubt, and temptation; as Warren J. Smith interprets Cyril: the patristic author "goes on to say that, though Jesus experiences the full range of emotions that all

32 Smith, 474.

33 John Knox, *The Humanity and Divinity of Christ: A Study of Pattern in Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 47.

34 Christopher A. Beeley, "Christ and Human Flourishing in Patristic Theology," *Pro Ecclesia* 25, no. 2 (Spr 2016): 135.

35 Ibid.

36 Daniel A. Keating, "The Baptism of Jesus in Cyril of Alexandria: The Re-Creation of the Human Race," *Pro Ecclesia* 8, no. 2 (Spr 1999): 204.

37 More on the Garden of Gethsemane Scene follows in Chapter 2

38 Thomas Cattoi, "Flawed Subjectivities: Cyril of Alexandria and Mahayana Buddhism on Individual Volition, Sin, and Karma," *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, no. 37 (January 2017): 32.

mortals feel, he was not disturbed by them to the degree that we are.”³⁹ Smith goes on to note that for Cyril the protests of Jesus, brought on by his fear and doubt, “were not at all shocking...but they express the very ambivalence of a man possessed of both a vulnerable and frightened human nature.”⁴⁰

Suffering, Sacrifice, & Salvation

What is the purpose of maintaining that Jesus felt these emotions and that they were indeed real sufferings of the human will, no different than the suffering of any other human individual? For Cyril, the answer lies in freedom:

Just as death was brought to naught in no other way than by the death of the Saviour, so also with regard to each of the passions of the flesh. For unless [Christ] had felt cowardice human nature could not be freed from cowardice; unless He had experienced grief there would never have been any deliverance from grief; unless He had been troubled and alarmed, no escape from these feelings could have been found. And with regard to every human experience, you will find exactly the corresponding thing in Christ. The passions of His flesh were aroused, not that they might have the upper hand as they do in us, but in order that when aroused they might be thoroughly subdued by the power of the Word dwelling in the flesh, the nature thus undergoing a change for the better.⁴¹

Jesus' suffering was a means in which to curb our own suffering. In all things Jesus tries to position himself in parallel with the persons to which he preaches and this is no different in the realm of suffering. And just as he conquers death, Jesus conquers suffering through the “Word dwelling in the flesh” that transforms the nature and becomes an example for man on how to withstand suffering through the grace of God. Of course, as Jesus lights the way he also becomes the prime exemplar; he provides himself as an example that we can overcome our fear, anguish, and woe just as his very human nature does as he “masters the emotion that has been aroused and immediately transforms that which has been conquered by fear into incomparable courage.”⁴² A much higher standard, but no less a standard than would be expected from a uniquely divine and human subject.

Cyril successfully gives us examples on how, though two natures united as one, there are particular modes⁴³ of power unique to each the divine and human wills of Jesus, and that both natures necessarily make up the figure of Jesus Christ, “I would myself assert that neither God's Word, while separate from the humanity, nor the temple born of a woman, when not united to the Word, can be called 'Jesus Christ.' For what we think of as Christ is God's Word after it has been ineffably brought together with the humanity in accordance with the saving union.”⁴⁴ Moreover, the human will provides a blueprint of sorts as to how to suffer as He did – with courage and faith in the Word. Cyril points to the positioning of Jesus as wholly human in his suffering, and this subsequent example of the suffering human, as a means for us to both suffer-with and find hope-via-parallelity in our own suffering.

39 Smith, 474.

40 Ibid, 475.

41 Ibid, 95.

42 Ibid, 94.

43 "Modes" is not the ideal word to use here as it points to obvious Trinitarian issues, like Modalism. However, a sufficient cognate is hard to find (hence the mystery of the Trinity); one cannot say really say "modes", "powers", "aspects", "personalities", et al., without slipping into some sort of heresy. The point to take is that Cyril acknowledges a differentiation between the whole of the Trinity in three parts which is, paradoxically, whole in an of itself.

44 Cyril, *Three Treatises*, 63.

The sacrifice of Jesus is that he gave his life in exchange for the exoneration of sin. He took upon himself the “sins of the world” and, in carrying this load for them, baptized humanity anew so that they may worship and go forth with the promise of the redemption of further sins. Erdman says on this, that “Jesus' death was not a punishment he endured in our place; it was a freely offered sacrifice of obedience to restore a relationship broken by human sin, which had prevented us from being in harmony with the divine order.”⁴⁵ The physical death and sacrifice has long been the focus point of the suffering and redemptive components of the life of Jesus. This is the death that took what we might call the “living” out of Jesus – he ceased to breath, his heart stopped, and the blood ran from his body. The temporal death, however, took the “life” from Jesus; by which I mean that he was robbed of his familial connections, friendships, hope, and the mystery of a life yet to be discovered. I use the word “temporal” because what was taken from him was time – the promise of a future that motivates and steers an individual throughout a life.

Unsurprisingly, for Cyril the importance of Jesus' being fully human lay in this soteriological goal of Christ. In order to take upon the sins of the world and be a sacrifice for humankind, Christ must have lived and died as one of them. This mutes any objection to Jesus' sacrifice as being ornamental or symbolic. Just as he was subject to the rationality of a human soul he was subject to the pain, temporality, and ultimate finality of a human life. Christopher A. Beeley says that “Jesus' cry of abandonment from the cross represents God's inclusion and incorporation of Christ's human suffering into the saving embrace of the divine life, and Christ's suffering shows us how much God loves broken and sinful creatures.”⁴⁶ This is a uniquely human characteristic that would be impossible for the divine to share in, at least in a human way, as Cyril says “since on this account he wished to suffer, even though he was beyond the power of suffering in his nature as God, then he wrapped himself in flesh that was capable of suffering, and revealed it as his very own, so that even the suffering might be said to be his because it was his own body which suffered and no one else's.”⁴⁷ Jesus had to be man to complete the salvation circle of the first man, Adam - as Adam was present at the initial fall of man into sin, Jesus reconciles this fall by adopting the sin of humankind as an eternal “scape-goat.”

Cyril expounds on the above ideas in *Three Christological Treatises* when he notes that “unless the Word became flesh, he would not 'be able to help those who are being tempted because he himself suffered and was tempted.' A shadow cannot feel pain. The fact of his being 'with us' would mean nothing at all.”⁴⁸ That is to say, a Christ that does not suffer and die as his servants do cannot fully align himself with those servants. However, though Christ's human nature suffers, his divinity does not as Cyril makes sure to point out in saying that “the Word's nature took the humanity to itself for sure, but he was not 'merely' human. Instead, because his own glory overshadowed the element that he assumed, the Word permanently preserved his divine transcendence without confusing it with the humanity.”⁴⁹

The salvation of humanity comes at it's becoming – like God – divine and everlasting. This transformation must be preceded by the opposite transformation – God becoming man. In this way, Jesus as divine man becomes the example by which humanity is to become perfected and eventually share in the divinity of God since “we are given, solely as a gift of grace, a participation in Christ's

45 Erdman, 464.

46 Beeley, 133.

47 Ibid, 118.

48 Cyril, *Three Treatises*, 42.

49 Ibid, 67.

being – not in essence but by grace.”⁵⁰ Cyril says that the salvation brought on by the suffering and death of Jesus “is how he transmits the grace of sonship even to us so that we too can become children of the Spirit, insofar as human nature had first achieved this possibility in him”⁵¹ and that “in short, he took what was ours to be his very own so that we might have all that was his.”⁵² There is a very practical theological implication in this – Jesus does not just *speak* of the suffering of man as a means towards transformation and divinity but instead *examples* this process himself; Christ's passion is not one of poetics, metaphor, nor sage-like advice, it is a real-world suffering of body and mind in order to demonstrate the inherent possibility of the human person to become divine.

For Cyril, there is also the implication of the first sin of man, perpetrated by Adam. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were granted paradise, a heaven on Earth, with everlasting life and no corruption. However, once Adam ate of the forbidden fruit, sin and transgression against the desire of God for humanity entered the world. This sin stays with man as an integral part of his human nature, though not its divine possibilities and, as Thomas Cattoi notes, this “ancestral sin diminishes our self-determination and de facto strips us of holiness.”⁵³ Jesus has to return to Earth as perfect man to be the exemplar human who displays the possibility, through His perfected human form which does not sin, that humans can still strive toward and achieve divinity, as Cyril says, “we too are sons and gods by grace, and we have surely been brought to this wonderful and supernatural dignity since we have the Only Begotten Word of God dwelling within us.”⁵⁴ Again, this action must be literal in order for the example to hold merit, as Cyril makes clear, “if the Word has not become flesh then neither has the dominion of death been overthrown, and in no way has sin been abolished, and we are still held captive in the transgressions of the first man, Adam, deprived of any return to a better condition; a return which I would say has been gained by Christ the Savior of us all.”⁵⁵

The above exhibits what I have briefly mentioned previously; the intelligent design of the sacrifice of Christ is not done symbolically like a goat to slaughter but as a way of drawing a spiritual map. Christ came to Earth to show that a person, through the grace of God, might achieve the divinity they desire for an everlasting union with the divinity of God. Christ died to exhibit that it is God, not sin, that might ultimately conquer the hearts and minds of men. The difference being that Christ, as perfect man, had no sins of his own but took on those sins of all of humanity in his sacrifice so that they might ascend, as he has, to divinization, not being weighed down by the stain of transgression. Cyril says that “to perfect the Son through sufferings when he descended into the self-emptying and was made man, that is when he took the form of a slave and consecrated his own flesh as a ransom for the life of all.”⁵⁶ That being said, Cyril does not view Christ's taking upon the sin of humanity as the end of sin nor the end of the weakness of man; Christ may be the exemplar, but his humanity was pre-perfected whereas individual humanities on a whole are imperfect. According to Cyril, the process lay in Jesus' “cleansing of their sin all who entreat him, he anoints them with his very own Spirit. In his role as God the Father's Word, he infuses this Spirit and causes it to well up within us from his very own nature, whereas in his role as a man he physically breathed it out in a perfectly ordinary way, doing so for the sake of the salvific purpose of the Incarnation.”⁵⁷ The promise comes more in the form

50 Anderson, 63.

51 Cyril, *On the Unity*, 63.

52 Ibid, 59.

53 Cattoi, 32.

54 Cyril, *On the Unity*, 80.

55 Ibid, 50.

56 Ibid, 114.

57 Cyril, *Three Treatises*, 73.

of our ability to continually strive toward and return to Christ and eventually achieve divinization, despite our transgressions, as Cyril notes “what he achieved was beyond the ability of our condition, and what seemed to have been worked out in human weakness and by suffering was really stronger than men and a demonstration of the power that pertains to God.”⁵⁸ All of this: the salvific nature of the death and resurrection of Christ, as well as the implications of that resurrection and doing-away with sin are, according to Cynthia Peters Anderson, attributed to the single subjective nature of Christ denoted in Cyril and that the patristic author “affirms that Christ personally experiences real human suffering and temptation and the same time overcomes them from within, and he provides this as a model for all of humanity who can now overcome these difficulties through the indwelling power of God.”⁵⁹

58 Cyril, *On the Unity*, 130.

59 Anderson, 52.

2: On Anxiety

Now that we have delineated just what we mean by Jesus' humanity, in light of the Christological work of Cyril of Alexandria, we turn to a specific sub-topic within that humanity of importance to this thesis; that of anxiety and its associated emotions, which we touched on briefly in Chapter 1. In order to do this I have first chosen to take a closer look at the Garden of Gethsemane scene from the Gospels. This scene is an acute example of how Christ was subject to a very real, and very human, anxiety and has implications for our understanding of what we mean when we say Christ was fully human. After this Gethsemane exploration, we turn to the Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard, for a fuller understanding of what anxiety is and how it relates to faith.

The Gethsemane Scene

The scene at the Garden of Gethsemane is well-known and pivotal to the Christ narrative; it is in many ways its own “passion” as Jesus navigates a series of tumultuous emotional and psychological hurdles: his fear of death, the waning loyalty of his disciples, the pains of responsibility. Though it is not the first instance where Jesus' emotional vulnerability is witnessed, it is the most concise and concrete example of a select sequence of moments where these vulnerabilities are on full display. This section will highlight some of the Garden's most important instances of humanity as displayed by Christ as well as some select scholarly commentary in regards to meaning and interpretation regarding the scene.

In speaking on the application of the Gethsemane scene as a means by which to interpret the human condition, authors Jan-Olav Henriksen and Karl Olav Sandnes, in their article “The Vulnerable Human and Absent God” say that “the stories about Gethsemane depict Jesus as highly emotional, making it an apt point of departure for an exercise in theological anthropology”⁶⁰ and that “Jesus appears weak, helpless and wracked by doubt about his mandate: this passage vividly displays the human Jesus.”⁶¹ We can witness the human Jesus that Henriksen and Sandnes are pointing to with a variety of passages from the Gethsemane scene including Jesus' saying “my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death”⁶² in Matthew's Gospel and in Mark's Gospel when, in the moments before prayer begins in the Garden, the apostle says that Jesus “began to be deeply distressed and troubled.”⁶³

An interesting point that the above authors bring up is that though these passages may now seem to have a natural place in scripture it was not always that way. In fact they point out that “it can surprise modern readers to learn that the Gethsemane scene was actually troublesome to many early Christians. A Jesus in agony at the prospect of his death – particularly because his fate was in accordance with his divinely given mandate – clashed with contemporary ideals and militated against

60 Henriksen and Sandnes, 164.

61 Ibid, 165.

62 Mt 26:38.

63 Mk 14:33.

theological convictions expressed elsewhere in the gospels.”⁶⁴ This points to the unique quality of the Gethsemane scene as depicting Jesus with an intense vulnerability. This vulnerability, despite being unconventional to the character of Jesus, is natural for a human being. Therefore, the display of such an outward appearance of his human condition and soul is in accordance with Cyril's insistence that Jesus was possessed by, and susceptible to, all the conditions of ordinary human life just like any other human being.

Another striking passage from the Gethsemane scene is when Jesus is petitioning God to free him of the burden of his destiny, saying “my Father, if it possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”⁶⁵ A line which Henriksen and Sandnes say could be interpreted as cowardly, depicting a man “who is selfish and a slave to his greed: a person controlled by vices” or “equivalent to a soldier considering abandoning his post”⁶⁶ and which “Cyril says, illustrates the weakness of human nature unaided by the Holy Spirit when confronted with imminent suffering.”⁶⁷ The authors do not present this as evidence of the ineffectiveness or powerlessness of Jesus, however, but as an indication of the true humanity which he must possess, or possesses him, in order for the soteriological mission to be actualized. In fact, Henriksen and Sandnes see this representation as a means by which Jesus can be understood in his humanity, saying of the scene that it is “disturbing to the conveniently coherent picture offered by the gospels and thus has the potential to depict Jesus with more psychological and historical accuracy than the theologically framed story found in the gospels.”⁶⁸ To understand Jesus in his humanity is, again, integral to understanding the implications of his sacrifice.

After Jesus petitions God to intervene on his behalf and save him from death God remains silent and gives no indication of reply. For Henriksen and Sandnes this completes the full experience of the human condition: to be in agony, grief, a state of anxiety, and to realize that one is all alone in these experiences, lamenting, “we argue that it is part of the human condition to have this experience of absence”⁶⁹ and that “Jesus' agony and vulnerability are our point of departure. We argue that it belongs to the fundamental human condition to be *vulnerable in the face of danger and death*.”⁷⁰ So, it is their contention that it is at this moment of vulnerability, Jesus' asking of God to spare him and receiving only the silence of God, where the fullest expression of his humanity is displayed and actualized. It is in the Garden, particularly when he realizes that he is truly alone and vulnerable, that Jesus is met with his own mini-”dark night of the soul” and in this way shares with the rest of humanity its most troubling, vulnerable, and painful parts; the authors note, “Jesus encountered and had to face the givens of human life, which imply that the given existential loneliness is part of that human existence which Jesus had to share with the rest of humanity and that, even for him, could not be obliterated by his close relationship with God.”⁷¹

While Jesus is steadfast in his humanity in the Garden he is not without the presence of the divine, as Keating adds in his "Introduction" to Cyril's *On the Unity of Christ*, “in a very telling comment, Cyril states that if the Son does not possess the Spirit essentially, then he could at any time

64 Henriksen and Sandnes, 165.

65 Mt 26:39.

66 Henriksen and Sandnes, 165.

67 Smith, 482.

68 Henriksen and Sandnes, 165.

69 Ibid, 170.

70 Ibid, 171.

71 Henriksen and Sandnes, 175.

reject sanctification, just as we can.”⁷² While Jesus is as susceptible to the allure of retreating from death as any other human would be, the Spirit compels him not to give in to such temptation. This does not mean that the divine itself inhabits the body but that in the union of human and divine, while both act according to their natures, it is in the nature of the Spirit to sway the human Jesus toward his divine plan. Keating continues, “did the Word change into flesh, fall from majesty, or undergo a transformation? Not at all, Cyril assures us, for he is by nature 'immutable and unchangeable' (I, 44). He has certainly become a man like us, but he remains unchangeably what he was.”⁷³

In a sense, due to the unique nature of the hypostatic union of human and divine in Jesus, this ability for the Spirit to lead the flesh away from its base-most wants and needs could seem like an evasion, simply an obvious supernatural quality of a supernatural individual. However, the process is not so different than how any human adherent might view the work of the Spirit and the utilization of prayer as a guiding force or directional pull that assists at times when the flesh is weak or in temptation. In “Suffering Impassibly” Smith speaks on Cyril's view's of the Garden scene, stating that the Alexandrian “sees Christ's two natures existing side by side in tension and in conflict about the ordeal which awaits. In his prayer, Jesus speaks out of the impulses of both natures. Yet every time his humanity recoils from its duty, it is checked by his immutable divinity which will not deviate from the determined course.”⁷⁴ While for the character of Jesus the process – prayer and intercession of the divine – might not appear so different from a parallel process in any adherent, the difference lay in the extremities of these powers; the Spirit and humanity are both perfectly fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ and neither are inherently incapable of fulfilling their soteriological goal nor transgressing in any real way that might ultimately affect this goal.

The necessary unity of human and divine in Christ in the Garden scene displays the inability for the flesh or Spirit alone to fulfill the soteriological goal but acts therefore as an exemplar for humankind that they too must possess a harmony of body and Spirit. Smith says that “the weakness of Christ's flesh in the face of death serves as an example to us of our own vulnerability and impotence to fulfill God's will if we try to act within the reaches of our natural powers.”⁷⁵ The very same push and pull that we experience is articulated in the Garden by Jesus when he chastises his disciples and says that “the spirit is willing, but the body is weak.”⁷⁶ Smith notes that for Cyril, “Christ is a single person who feels the emotional pull of his human desire to flee death”⁷⁷ and that “Christ's plea in Matthew 26, 'Let this cup pass from me,'...illustrates the weakness of human nature unaided by the Holy Spirit when confronted with imminent suffering.”⁷⁸ Jesus, like all of humankind, could not walk the human path alone, unaided by the guidance of the Spirit.

What the above illustrates is that in the mysterious interaction between the two wills of Christ, when the humanity is stumbling in its mission the divine reorients the will back toward the soteriological mission. In speaking on how Cyril views Christ's human nature in relation to the scene at the Garden of Gethsemane, J. Warren Smith states that for Cyril “perhaps the most vivid illustration of Christ's suffering the passions of human nature and yet remaining fixed with respect to the good is

72 Keating, 204.

73 Ibid, 209.

74 Smith, 473.

75 Ibid, 482.

76 Mt 26:41.

77 Smith, 476.

78 Ibid, 482.

found in Cyril's account of Jesus' experience in the Garden of Gethsemane. Here Cyril sees Christ's two natures existing side by side in tension and in conflict about the ordeal which awaits. In his prayer, Jesus speaks out of the impulses of both natures. Yet every time his humanity recoils from its duty, it is checked by him immutable divinity which will not deviate from the determined course."⁷⁹ This is important to note: Jesus' human nature, like all human nature, existed in a condition that necessitated an ability for failure in his mission. In a very literal sense, Jesus could not achieve the perfection of humanity if it were not for the participation of the divine.

All of this is to say that Jesus comes to encounter the world as any other human would – what's more, he comes to encounter the world with a primary anxiety; existential dread while fearing the neglect of God. Henriksen and Sandnes say that “the experience of God's absence is a significant indication and consequence of the vulnerable state of human existence”⁸⁰ and this state, if only briefly, is one that inhabits Jesus in the Garden. This is the “passion” I indicate at the beginning of this section; not physical, not simply mental or emotional, but spiritual as well – Jesus feels abandoned and in need of reassurance that his soteriological goals hold the significance that the ending of his life will warrant. To look more closely at the implications of that is to understand that much of Jesus' suffering in the Garden was due to the inability to understand why he felt parted from God, alone, abandoned, and possibly even betrayed.

Of course, with the bias of hindsight we know that Jesus was not alone nor abandoned even before God reassures him of this. Therefore, the reading of a text such as this has the application of adoption by adherents in a form of imitation or, at least, an anecdote for themselves when feeling alone, abandoned, or ignored. Olav and Sandnes say that this “engagement with the texts may help [adherents] feel that they are not alone and that the situations in which they find themselves are not unique, but something already shared by others,” in this case Christ himself, and that individuals might use these texts for “orientation in some way” and “with the content of biblical sources, the easier they may find [a] task.”⁸¹ For Henriksen and Sandnes, the importance of Jesus' portrayal in the Garden comes down to the need to showcase him as vulnerable as “vulnerability is among the main conditions for being closely connected to others, whether psychologically, emotionally, or physically.”⁸² Seen on a grander scale, this summarizes the soteriological mission in and of itself; God who is invulnerable must become human and share in humanity's vulnerability in order to succumb to it and, ultimately, create a new covenant whose promise is written in the blood of susceptibility. This is where we see, yet again, that an ornamental and metaphorical sacrifice would do no justice for the salvation goal of Christ, as the authors insist, “the one who experiences [themselves] as vulnerable is given an opportunity to come closer to what it means to really be a human.”⁸³

Vulnerability then, at least in the Christian sense, lends itself to an interconnected reliance, both communal and spiritual. We as humans need one another to keep each other safe and ensure a level of cooperation, as we all recognize in ourselves and others the inherent vulnerability and fragility of life. It also ensures that as humans we recognize the flaws and imperfections that we harbour, which leads to advances in philosophy, technology, and justice. Olav and Sandnes say, in fact, that due to inherent vulnerability, “the act of praying is tantamount to acknowledging, at least tacitly, dependence on

79 Smith, 473.

80 Henriksen and Sandnes, 164.

81 Ibid, 163.

82 Ibid, 171.

83 Ibid, 171.

others.”⁸⁴ It follows, in an objective experience, what one can recognize in themselves they can too in others; the Gethsemane scene therefore both reiterates the complexities of loneliness one might feel in oneself while also reinforcing the shared nature of such experiences, as Henricksen and Sandnes observe, “the Gethsemane story displays the common experience of anguish and anxiety in the face of death and one's own mortality, as well as human loneliness.”⁸⁵

Kierkegaard's Concept of Anxiety

The preceding sections have been an attempt to show two things: the characterization of the human nature of Christ as delineated by the patristic scholar Cyril of Alexandria and the specific ways this human nature was on display in the Garden of Gethsemane scene. This has been accomplished by utilizing both primary works of Cyril himself as well as more contemporary scholarship on Cyril, the Garden, and the humanity of Christ. In doing so we have devised that according to this patristic and contemporary scholarship Jesus was fully human in nature along with being fully divine and that he was subject to the full spectrum of human experience. One of the most prudent of these human experiences evidenced in the Garden scene is his encounter with anxiety through his fear and trepidation of his soteriological mission and ultimate sacrifice. What the present section aims to do is utilize the 19th century philosopher Søren Kierkegaard's characterization of anxiety as a means to further show the necessity of such a condition in the salvatory figure of Jesus fully immersed in his humanity.

In his "Introduction" to Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Anxiety*, translator Alastair Hannay notes that the philosopher has said that “Christianity...is better understood as a form of communication, a way of associating based not on outward proof of membership but on an understanding of what it is to be a human being, with its deficits, trials, and hopes for fulfillment, and also fear of what is required to make good the human deficit.”⁸⁶ While he is describing the faith in general, one can see how the figure-head of the movement, Jesus himself, exhibits these same traits and the necessity by which he had to go through these very trials in his full humanity as a way in which to communicate the soteriological promise. Jesus' communication was through his sacrifice and his participation in the human condition.

If we are to understand Jesus as human and feeling the extents of the human condition we must also view that condition as being communal, not in the sense that it is a shared burden, but in the sense of it being a relatable and relational burden. Kierkegaard makes this point more poetically in voicing that “what is essential to human existence, that the human being is *individuum* and, as such, at one and the same time itself and the whole human race, so that the whole race participates in the individual and the individual the whole race.”⁸⁷ That is to say, we are not to witness the suffering and sacrifice of Jesus as that of the “other” in so far as he is of a different nature, but since he is human, we witness this sacrifice in terms of an “us” - with the recognition that Christ is himself one of these “us”.

For Kierkegaard, anxiety is not necessarily holding the mostly-negative connotations it does contemporaneously but instead might be looked at as an interpretation of the activities of the mind and spirit when confronted with freedom, or the prospect of freedom. He says that “anxiety is the dizziness

⁸⁴ Ibid, 171-72.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 174.

⁸⁶ Alastair Hannay, Introduction to *The Concept of Anxiety*, by Søren Kierkegaard (New York: Liveright, 2014), xvii.

⁸⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Oriented Deliberation in View of the Dogmatic Problem of Hereditary Sin*, trans. by Alastair Hannay (New York: Liveright, 2014), 35.

of freedom that emerges when spirit wants to posit the synthesis, and freedom now looks down into its own possibility and then grabs hold of finiteness to support itself. In this dizziness freedom subsides.”⁸⁸ In fact, Kierkegaard claims that anxiety is a necessary condition for a life in the spirit and that “whoever has learned to be anxious in the right way has learned the ultimate”⁸⁹ as anxiety acts as a way in which the subject is able to transcend the conditions of their humanity in an effort to allow the spirit to guide them, stating of a subject that “anxiety enters into his soul and searches out everything, and frightens the finite and petty out of him, and it then leads him where he will.”⁹⁰

In the Garden of Gethsemane we witness, in the person of Jesus, a characterization of Kierkegaard's description of anxiety. Jesus is faced with very real fear and danger and exhibits a timidity toward his mission. In more Kierkegaardian terms he is in a moment of anxiety as he has become “dizzy” in the negotiation of freedom between his human and divine natures; while he wishes to carry-out his celestial mission he also does not wish to lose the life he has now. And, in accord with what Cyril of Alexandria notes, the Spirit, the divine nature of Christ, does not inhabit the human though it can guide and anchor the rational soul. In both these cases, a force beyond the material flesh and rational soul pulls the subject away from finitude toward an absoluteness that Kierkegaard would say we inherently desire: “self-conscious spirit apprehends a beyond that it knows thought cannot possibly reach, but for which it nonetheless has a longing, although in a more personal and full-blooded way than that provided in thought.”⁹¹

What's more is that the story of Jesus in the Garden is one of intense faith – when faced with this dizziness of freedom and a choice between life and death while grappling with (and even asking to be exempted from) a divine mission Jesus chooses to complete his mission. Again, not without trepidation and a plea to be passed over for this mission. But for Kierkegaard this look into the unknown and being drawn bravely by the spirit forms the basis of faith as R.S. Kemp and Michael Mullaney take note of the author's thoughts of this, stating that “in 'The Expectancy of Faith,' Kierkegaard reaffirms a central theme from the pseudonymous works: that a person's orientation toward the future is vitally important for his ability to find meaning in the present.”⁹² Then the question becomes how is this orientation toward the future just not more anxiety-producing? To which Kierkegaard answers: “the key to conquering the future is placing one's confidence in the 'eternal,' that is, having religious faith.”⁹³ In essence, for Kierkegaard, anxiety is a function of the spiritual individual as a bridge over which the divine calls to the human or finite and is crossed in the moments of uncertainty acknowledged as the individual's realization of freedom.

A central theme of characterization in Kierkegaard's description of anxiety is how integral an emotion it is to being human; not only in our psychological selves but in the ways in which we experience the world, commenting that for the individual “the more anxiety, the more sensuousness.”⁹⁴ This sensuousness goes even further than a worldly experience, however, and is inextricably tied up with how we access a life that interconnects our physical selves with that of God, with Kierkegaard saying that if one “maintains that the great thing about him is that he has never been in anxiety, I will

88 Ibid, 75.

89 Ibid, 189.

90 Ibid, 192.

91 Hannay, xvii.

92 R.S. Kemp and Michael Mullaney. “Kierkegaard on the (Un)Happiness of Faith.” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 26, no. 3 (May 2018): 481.

93 Ibid, 482.

94 Kierkegaard, 89.

gladly provide him with my explanation: that it comes from his being very spiritless.”⁹⁵ For Kierkegaard, to experience anxiety is a recognition in the self of a multitude of choices; God/man, Spirit/will, mission/desire, between which there is an ongoing interplay of interpretation and choice. In this grey area lay a tenuousness through which the individual must negotiate between their most primal wants and their spiritual callings and it is through this process that they are engaged in a life of the Spirit. The misinterpretation, perversion, or distortion of the acquiescence of these base needs toward the true calling of the Spirit cause the rift of sin in the individual, as an imperfect creation is bound to err whilst attempting to adhere to the will of their perfect creator. The rift of sin is not only to be expected but indicative of an individual striving toward a reconciliation with God as Kierkegaard says in fact, “through sin the human being's sensuousness is posited as sinfulness and is therefore lower than that of the beast, and yet this is precisely because this is where that which is higher begins. For now begins spirit.”⁹⁶

In coming to see a connection between how the emotive Jesus, in the depths of anguish, and the individual human relate we turn again to Kierkegaard; in “Sin and Dread” the Danish philosopher maintains that “one despairs *over* that which fixes one in despair, over one's misfortune, for example, over the earthly, over the loss of one's fortune, but *about* that which, rightly understood, releases one from despair, therefore about the eternal, about one's salvation, about one's power.”⁹⁷ The object of our despair, therefore, is not that which causes us to despair but that which would alleviate that despair – both examples, that of human and Christ, point in the obvious direction of God. When Jesus is lamenting to God in the Garden the despair is fixed on God's taking the burden of salvation from him just as, when we are in despair and pray, the focus of our desperation is not fixed on the problem but on the problem going away through the grace of God. Furthermore, we are drawn toward the blackness of despair, Kierkegaard adding, “dread is an alien power which takes hold of the individual, and yet one cannot extricate oneself from it, does not wish to, because one is afraid, but what one fears attracts one.”⁹⁸ What is most interesting here is if despair draws us towards the eternal and God, then it is through this attraction of fear a path is forged toward that eternal and therefore that fear is a necessary device, not as a moral compass, but as a way in which to encounter our own salvations.

What is particularly compelling about Kierkegaard's propositions on fear is its connection to sin; the philosopher remarks that “anxiety about sin produces sin...in the faintness of anxiety, the individual swoons and is for that very reason both guilty and innocent.”⁹⁹ And, though we know Jesus was sinless due to his perfectly human form, we could intimate something of an anxiety about sin for he surely would not sweat blood nor be in such turmoil in the Garden if he was not in the least worried about his inability to obey or fulfill God's command. Perhaps then, if we have to contend with the Cyrillian insistence on the sinlessness of Christ, we can at least say that sin, if not a personal flaw but an external force, would have had some undesired effect on Jesus; perhaps this could be described by Kierkegaard when he says that “sin's entering the world had significance for the whole of creation. The effect of this sin on the nonhuman aspect of life I have called objective anxiety.”¹⁰⁰ This could further be explored when Kierkegaard says elsewhere that “sin lies in the will, not the intellect; and this

95 Ibid, 190.

96 Ibid, 108.

97 Søren Kierkegaard, *The Living Thoughts of Kierkegaard*, ed. W.H. Auden (New York: New York Review Books, 1999), 150.

98 Ibid, 163.

99 Kierkegaard, *Concept of Anxiety*, 89.

100 Ibid, 71.

corruption of the will goes well beyond the consciousness of the individual;”¹⁰¹ while still contending that Jesus was sinless we might say that his human will held the potential toward sin and it was that will at odds with his divine will which caused these “near-sin” moments. In fact, if we are to understand Kierkegaard, sin is seen as an essential element in the soteriological mission as the corruption of the will, and therefore a re-navigation from the human to the divine will, allows for redemptive grace, he says that “it is only with sin that providence is there, holds good again here: only with sin is atonement posited, and its sacrifice is not repeated.”¹⁰² Perhaps then what we can say of Christ is that yes, he was sinless, but that he was essentially on the precipice of sin in his susceptibility toward sin. As we have seen in the Garden and the Desert, Jesus did feel fear and was tempted and, despite not withering to either, he was *acted upon* by sin through his anxieties, fear, and temptations. If we look even more closely at Jesus asking God to take the cup away from him, Kierkegaard says that “sin is: before God in despair not to will to be oneself, or before God in despair to will to be oneself;”¹⁰³ this is not meant to be a riddle, it is the reality that one is closer to sin in their human will which wishes to fulfill (or turn away from) a very human desire for self-actualization – the goal for Kierkegaard, exhibited perfectly in Christ, is a disregard for this human will in favour of a divine acquiescence which, as we are to understand, fulfills human perfection.

101 Ibid, *Living Thoughts*, 163.

102 Ibid, *Concept of Anxiety*, 127.

103 Ibid, *Living Thoughts*, 149.

3: Toward a Contemporary Form of *Imitatio Christi*

If one of the goals of this thesis is to understand the humanity of Christ in Cyril's thought as it might pertain to a contemporary theological audience, it is imperative to understand where that audience's current understanding lay. While there has been a multitude of theological advances since the time of patristics, there are particular scholars of (relatively) recent times that I believe are especially important to the process of revisiting older sources, such as Cyril: Bernard Lonergan, a Jesuit who is hailed as one of the most important theological minds of the 20th century, and John D. Caputo, a philosopher and theologian who continues to work in the field of postmodernism and its theological application. Both thinkers stress the need of a renewed perspective upon which to view past intellectual strides in order to make those strides continue in their relevancy and application, contemporaneously. These thinkers, aided once again by the thoughts of Kierkegaard and the introduction of Thomas à Kempis, provide this paper the groundwork for re-contextualizing the thoughts of Cyril so as to apply his early Christological insights to a more modern theological landscape and develop a method toward a contemporary imitation of Christ.

Finding Meaning & Freedom Through Bernard Lonergan

Although Bernard Lonergan is often writing in reaction to the growing modernist movement that surrounded him in the Vatican II era Church, he is often (wittingly or not) adding to its cause with treatises on how to be theological in spite of intellectual, economic, or linguistic circumstance, how to interpret text as an individual, and how to understand theology in the 20th century. In Lonergan's work *Method in Theology* we see a similarity with John D. Caputo, whom we will investigate later, in that Lonergan likewise places great importance on the reorienting and repurposing of meaning to resonate with an audience based on their particular circumstances and needs with hermeneutics included as an essential component within the systematic method.

For Lonergan, interpretation can be seen as the act of discerning meaning as that which might be transported from era to era, whose intention stays relatively untouched while its means of delivery is augmented to meet the need of the time and circumstance of the age. The subtle point for Lonergan is that meaning is not to be seen as a static dogmatic truth but “an awareness, not of what is intended, but of the intending”¹⁰⁴ and that “meaning enters into the very fabric of human living but varies from place to place and from one age to another.”¹⁰⁵ Similar to, but not the same as, deconstruction,¹⁰⁶ Lonergan insists that the process of interpretation is a constant movement toward a more authentic authenticity and that, therefore, interpretation is “ever a withdrawal from unauthenticity, and every successful withdrawal only brings to light the need for still further withdrawals. Our advance in understanding

104 Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 15.

105 Ibid, 81.

106 In this paper, when I speak of "deconstruction/deconstructionism" I am referring to it as understood and popularized by the 20th century philosopher, Jacques Derrida.

being also the elimination of oversights and misunderstandings.”¹⁰⁷

Lonerger is scientific in his language of insight leading to meaning and uses the term “experimentation” and says of a hypothesis derived from experimentation, that “it keeps urging that experiments be devised and performed to check the implications of hypotheses against observable fact, and such processes of experimentation occur.”¹⁰⁸ In keeping with Lonergan's dialectical movement of insight, the Jesuit does not assume that experimentation stops after a positive hypothetical proof – instead the process of experimentation is expected to recur, possibly endlessly. Lonergan is opening up to the idea that while we may arrive at any point in time to an appropriate and working interpretation, we must also allow that the interpretation itself is and will be up for another re-interpretation, again and again, as the subjective nature of the interpreter dictates – therefore allowing previous insights and interpretations to respectfully dissolve. There is a succession to meaning, it is developmental and accumulative, but there is also a return in meaning – to either the question or earlier meanings. This denotes re-interpretation of previous meanings and intentions.

Therefore insight, for Lonergan, might be seen as fleeting or simply of-its-time. But, a complex method of investigation does not keep harping on “correct” answers but insists on the continued reframing and appropriation of the question in order to continually pursue the correct answer for a “now,” the author saying that “the transcendental field is defined not by what man knows, not by what he can know, but by what he can ask about; and it is only because we can ask more questions than we can answer that we know about the limitations of our knowledge.”¹⁰⁹ In this way, Lonergan is giving more value to the questions than the answers in the assumption that answers may vary and change but the questions are those things to which we must keep returning in order to orient our experience, though the questions themselves will evolve as well. This is why he says that this questioning “is an awareness, not of what is intended, but of the intending.”¹¹⁰

It is important to note that Lonergan does not dismiss the idea of an original or intended meaning – simply that this meaning would live on through reconstructing that meaning in a manner which proves accessible for receivers in a specific circumstance through time. Lonergan is urging us to accept that there might be a plurality of truths in the derivation of meaning that must be held, not in balance, but in a revolving circle of meaning with both/many correct according to the circumstance of their interpretation. There is still a certain degree of respect to be paid to attempting to discern original meaning from a text by the interpreter who, I believe he acknowledges, will still undoubtedly and necessarily come to some form of subjective understanding of that meaning. Describing this interpretive movement, Lonergan says that “the meaning of a text is an intentional entity. It is a unity that is unfolding through parts, sections, chapters, paragraphs, sentences, words. We can grasp the unity, the whole, only through the parts. At the same time the parts are determined in their meaning by the whole which each part partially reveals. Such is the hermeneutic circle.”¹¹¹

How then are we to stay true to a text if the meaning is only relevant via modern application? I believe Lonergan would insist that the continual discerning of the text, the insight from ongoing interpretation, in order for it to have contemporary application *is* (at least to a degree) the meaning of

107 Lonergan, 110.

108 Ibid, 5.

109 Ibid, 24.

110 Ibid, 15.

111 Ibid, 159.

the text. That is to say, the intention of a patristic theologian like Cyril in writing a treatise on the natures of Christ, whether conscious or not, isn't solely so that those in their immediate school, year, or epoch may benefit from its insights, but that the treatise's insights would be of benefit as long as it might be utilized by an audience in its intention. With this continued utilization comes a necessary augmentation in understanding and application in order for the intention to be appropriated from era to era, ear to ear. As for the reader: there is an inability to escape one's circumstance and, therefore, to ever truly regard a text in an entirely uninfluenced way. The interpreter can, of course, attempt as close an interpretation as possible that stays true to an original intention but this is, inevitably, limited by the influence of their own experiences.

It would be important to mention here that for Lonergan insight is cumulative, but is not only cumulative. It is easy to imagine a linear progression of insight but insight varies, changes, reviews passed insight, contradicts, and so forth. This is why the idea of dialectic is so important in understanding meaning – yes, there is a progression, if only through time, but we must be open to the dialectical assumptions that meaning varies and that previous meanings may not only go out of action toward a synthesis, but might also come back in. It is not hierarchical and linear, but cyclical and expanding. Lonergan says that “horizons may be opposed dialectically. What in one is found intelligible, in another is unintelligible. What for one is true, for another is false. What for one is good, for another is evil.”¹¹² The meaning itself need not necessarily change, but there is a re-interpretation called for in order for a transmission of that meaning to a contemporary audience. As Lonergan insists, “what permanently is true, is the meaning of the dogma in the context in which it was defined. To ascertain that meaning there have to be deployed the resources of research, interpretation, history, dialectic.”¹¹³ Lonergan is positing not only the multiplicity of meanings, its subjective natures, and its position in time, but that meaning is in constant flux even within the subject.

How does Lonergan approach those inarguable truths of the Church, he is after all a Jesuit priest? Again, we see two truths in a circle: there are those things of the Church which are uninterpretable but must also meet the need of a contemporary audience. And how is a contemporary audience supposed to receive these answers while being particular to their own place, time, and social setting? The answer is through means of interpretation. Though Lonergan does not explicitly say, nor do I believe he thinks, that these two things, original intention and interpretation, cannot be true at the same time. Instead, Lonergan is once again not looking at the idea of meaning as static, even in issues of dogmatic Church authority. I believe that for Lonergan the intention of meaning can be viewed as transcendent from person to person, epoch to epoch, but that this intentional meaning must be an interpreted meaning that suits the subject, community, or current era. So, a truth is not then lost, but the same truth is acquired through an appropriated meaning. This does not necessarily make truth subjective but rather leads a subject to a shared truth based on their particular circumstance.

In looking at Cyril of Alexandria in light of a contemporary understanding of Christ, Lonergan would likely not only say that this work can be done but is an unavoidable and necessary process in the striving of theology toward an ever-evolving authenticity, as authenticity is contingent on the people it serves, their circumstances and times. He quotes H.G. Gadamer in saying that the theorist “has contended that one really grasps the meaning of a text only when one brings its implications to bear upon contemporary living.”¹¹⁴ Therefore, in order for this research to transport the availability of

¹¹² Ibid, 236.

¹¹³ Ibid, 326.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 169.

Cyrrillian theology to a contemporary readership it must be done so with the attempt of receiving it through contemporary circumstance and understanding.

Similar to what has been shown in understanding the purpose of Cyril's Christology in Chapter 1, Lonergan too sees the goal of the object of Christ as salvatory, but as Raymond Moloney, SJ, says in "The Freedom of Christ in Later Lonergan," Lonergan views this mission to be completed through the activation of human freedom as a reflection of Christ's own freedom, saying that "the ultimate goal of Christology for Lonergan is soteriological. It has to ground the causality of Christ in human history generally with a view to understanding the communication of the divine friendship to the human race. The starting point for considering this aspect of the divine plan lies in Christ's own freedom as the exemplar and source of our freedom."¹¹⁵ This could be likened, perhaps, to another earlier section of this paper where Kierkegaard insists on the human will and its susceptibility toward sin as essential in Christ's (and our own) abilities to adhere to the divine will. In understanding the human aspect of this freedom, Moloney turns to Lonergan in saying that "the existential subject becomes manifest in the discovery 'that our choosing affects ourselves no less than the chosen or rejected objects and that it is up to each of us to decide for himself what he is to make of himself.'"¹¹⁶ We are vassals in this sense, who are subject to sin and temptation but it is in this subjugation that our human and divine wills meet; similarly to Cyril's explanation of how the divine will of Jesus takes over where the human will falters, we too have access to that very same power, through choice.

This is where we come to the difficulty of integrating both reason and emotion. We can reason away an improper choice, but that reason might be taken over by passion. Likewise, we can feel an impassioned drive toward something or someone but rationality holds us back, for better or worse. Moloney notes that this very real human difficulty is taken up in the later works of Lonergan, who had long been considered a strictly analytic thinker, saying that "many who know Lonergan only from *Insight* would have seen him as predominantly a 'head-person' and maybe would have found the intellectual rigour of his thought uncongenial. In [his] later period he is very clear that the cognitive levels of consciousness are not enough; they have to be 'subsumed under the higher operations that integrate knowing and feeling.'"¹¹⁷ That is to say, one cannot deny the presence of emotionality in human experience and that, while far more mysterious than reason, emotions are none the less integral to the whole of human experience, including freedom. What's more, Moloney says that "Lonergan speaks of such feelings as intentional responses to values. Through them one can begin to glimpse the direction in which fulfillment and moral self-transcendence lie."¹¹⁸ Values might be rational, but feelings cannot be assumed to be, necessarily, and it is in the reaction, not suppression, of emotion where subjective transcendence might take place. As we evidenced in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus knew in his rationality the role he must assume for humanity, but in his human will he struggled and negotiated with this inevitability and it was in the acceptance, the cooperation of reason and emotion, that he finally accepted his fate – it might even be said that this moment at the end of his prayer in the Garden, the instance where understanding and will come together, is the beginning of the crucifixion itself. Without slipping into any relativism, Lonergan would assert that it is in this space between reason and emotion where values are formed, with Moloney saying that "authenticity for Lonergan has within it a distinct moral element by which the person becomes committed to living according to values rather than according to satisfaction of spontaneous desires and aversion. This is the development that

¹¹⁵ Raymond Moloney, "The Freedom of Christ in the Later Lonergan," *Theological Studies* 70, no. 4 (2019): 802.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 803.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 804.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 805.

can pull us out of egoism and open us to other people in love and unselfishness.”¹¹⁹ We can therefore infer that, for Lonergan, the human will creates a composite individual that is emotive but whose emotions are informed by reason which produces values, these values are cornerstones into our moving away from pure subjectivity into community. Moloney summarizes how persons navigate this subjectivity:

One's identity is that by which one remains one and the same subject through all the stages of life, but the human subject cannot be conceived as fixed and immutable; and so the subject has its subjectivity. By one's subjectivity one is in a process of self-realization through self-transcendence, but the differences that emerge in this process regard not one's identity but one's subjectivity. Furthermore, as already noted, Lonergan regards personhood in a communal way. Community is one of the key formative factors in the articulation of the values that motivate our freedom.¹²⁰

In what ways is Lonergan's idea of personhood related to the personhood of Jesus? Moloney says that “there is both a divine freedom and a human freedom, each consciousness distinct from the other. It is the very distinctness of this human consciousness and subjectivity that sets the scene for the development of Christ's human freedom.”¹²¹ This human freedom is, however, not based on any moral relativism, but is firmly grounded in that which makes it free to begin with – a divine gift of grace. This is where, once again, we see the idea that under circumstances where the human is most free they do not turn away from God but embrace the spirit even more readily, as it is that which gives it their freedom, Moloney adding that “even on the human level, once the life of the 'drifter' is spurned, there is an authentic uniqueness to be gained by the free and responsible subject opting for genuine values. Clearly this happens to a supreme degree in the case of Christ, so that the human uniqueness, constituted by his human freedom, is the correlate of his uniqueness as divine. Indeed the one is the manifestation of the other, as the Word incarnate, in his historicity, makes himself a man.”¹²² The change does not come from becoming someone or something new, but in the becoming and accepting of oneself in her most authentic form. This is articulated in the character of Christ who readily dissolves away the constraints of his humanity to reach a more divine form, as Moloney notes, “it is sometimes said that freedom means being oneself, becoming oneself and becoming what one is. That can be said of Jesus in the fullest sense of the expression, since in his case it means becoming in his humanity what he is already in the depths of his divine personhood.”¹²³ Believers too can go through this process of self-authentication – Jesus was a human and his sinlessness was not as tied into his divinity as it was the idea that he was so authentically and perfectly human that he did not sin. Therefore, it could be said that, though the idea of reaching a human perfection on par with Jesus seems like an unlikely task, in the least man can improve certain aspects of their secular identity (ego, fear, expectation) as a means to grow closer to their own divine identity and relationship with God. What's more, this improving is not intended to be a burdensome task, though it may come with its own difficulties, but instead an emancipation of our human will just as it was for Jesus in the Garden. Moloney says that “the initial struggle in the garden is not evidence of the alienation of his will but precisely of conformity to the order of providence in his regard.”¹²⁴ For Jesus, and for adherents, freedom is the full articulation of the human will, in its most true and divinely-directed orientation, not the will's suppression.

119 Ibid, 806.

120 Ibid, 808.

121 Ibid, 811.

122 Ibid, 812.

123 Ibid, 815.

124 Ibid, 815.

Finally, let us look to what purpose the death and suffering of Jesus might have in Lonergan's thought, as well as how this further illuminates the important potentiality in Jesus' humanity and human will. For Lonergan scholar Mark T. Miller, the key to understanding Christ's passion, his suffering here on Earth, is to view this suffering as an exemplar of redemption and obedience. Of redemption, the author says it is "not simply an end, but also a process or movement. And for Lonergan, this process is not simply a means, but a mediation. Redemption has a 'sense of personal intervention,' for it concerns 'the interpersonal relations between Christ and God the Father, between Christ and sinners, and between Christ and those who are justified.'"¹²⁵ Miller asserts here that Lonergan sees the redemptive process of Christ as a conduit from the divine to the human; a communication of the promise of the new covenant. It may be hard for an adherent to understand the will of God – it was in fact difficult for Jesus in the Garden to come to terms with what the Father called him to do – which is why Jesus is placed as the conduit from the Father to the people. While, yes, this communication exists in the forms of the dialogue and parable we witness in the Gospel, it is also important (if not essential) that this communication be one of action and consequence as well; Jesus is a "do as I do" not a "do as I say" exemplar – but also one that demonstrates a larger reward for such an adherence to action. Miller says that "Lonergan affirms that Christ as human is the one mediator between God and humanity. Christ mediates redemption in his incarnation, his whole life (all his words and deeds, his entire person), his passion, and his resurrection...a new covenant, modern society might call reconciliation. Christ's personal mediation is a mediation of interpersonal reconciliation."¹²⁶

Lonergan intimates that there is a brokenness between God and man; that the promise of the old covenant has grown tired or forgotten. Or, even more dramatically, perhaps without an appropriate exemplar it was not a promise ever meant to be kept. Either way, it is in need of restoration in an appropriate manner and therefore an intervention is required. Miller says that "Lonergan understands Christ's person, words, and deeds, and gifts – culminating with his suffering, death, and resurrection – to be an intervention in these ruptured relationships, an intervention that seeks not to increase separation but to heal and to deepen interpersonal bonds."¹²⁷ In this new covenant we are promised our own redemption, the forgiveness of sin for all eternity, and a place in the Father's house in heaven – but what is asked of us? Again, the answer comes directly from Christ's own example, instead of a supernatural dictation: obedience. What's more, in order to be obedient like Christ we are not to simply blindly follow the will of God, but to understand that will – with its ramifications that our earthly desires might have trouble contending with – and obeying, both in spite of and to overcome these desires. This is Christ's example; when faced with a seemingly impossible task to follow a path because it is right, despite the urge not to, he gains the true freedom of being unshackled by the wants of the world and is directly solely toward a purpose. Of this type of freedom, Miller, interpreting Lonergan, relays that "on hearing that Christ suffered and died out of obedience, a contemporary Western reader (formed by individualism, human rights, and other ideas of the Enlightenment and modern liberalism) might come to believe that the Father forced or coerced the Son to act against the Son's will in a manner that violated the Son's freedom. On the contrary, Christ's suffering and death (as well as his life and resurrection) were acts of both perfect obedience and perfect freedom."¹²⁸ Perhaps it is now obvious that in this sense obedience is different than what we might imagine it to be – it is not the

¹²⁵ Mark T. Miller, "Why the Passion? : Bernard Lonergan on the Cross as Communication," PhD diss., (Boston College, 2008), 184.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 185.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 198.

following-out of tasks under fear of reprisal or any sort of stoic-minded endeavour to remain emotionless while resolute. Instead, Millar says that Lonergan “pairs obedience with love and 'obedience in this sense is a unity of heart and mind, a free choice and personal desire to do what one's beloved knows is good and desires to be done.'”¹²⁹ Obedience, in this fashion, is the opposite of a mindless and militant cooperation – it is something where the entirety of the individual, in their rational and emotional selves, makes the leap autonomously toward choosing the good. Again, Jesus here is the example of the one who we see rationalizing, loving, discerning, discussing, and ultimately choosing for himself his fate, which he knows to be the authentic expression of his personhood and human will; “Christ's suffering and death alone are not redemptive; it is his suffering and death *out of love and obedience* that merits redemption, provides satisfaction, and is the principle of the Law of the Cross.”¹³⁰

The Postmodern Push & John D. Caputo

We turn now to the oft-daunting arena of postmodernity; an arena that is for some intimidating, others confusing, and still others liberating – but either way, this area of thought deserves and rewards attention for this current investigation into the humanity of Christ. The issue that many scholars have with postmodernism is also it's most endearing quality, which James H. Olthuis, in “A vision of and for love: Towards a Christian post-postmodern worldview,” says is that it is an ideology that can be “characterized but not defined.”¹³¹ That is to say, we know postmodernity when we see it, when it is encountered, but to describe it poses many problems. The core of these problems of description lay in that postmodernity is not a set of principles, per se, as much as it is a stance by which one disseminates and encounters the world; it chooses, I would argue, to look at the world in a much more realistic view – one where “concrete” ideas often meet abstract responses, where emotion and circumstance are of legitimate concern, and where multi-faceted, sometimes contradictory, human character is embraced (though not necessarily understood). Olthuis says that “in contrast to Modernism's suppression of difference, the most distinctive feature of Postmodernism is its desire to embrace difference;”¹³² this is why I insist on the necessity of postmodern application despite the issues in its definition – if intellectual pursuit is a human endeavour, and humans are contradictory and fluid in their intelligibility and insight, so too must our approach to scholarship (in this case theology) embrace that part of ourselves which is subject to change and augmentation with meaning sometimes holding two or more contradictory notions in an ever-wavering balance.

Olthuis attempts to provide a bridge between the static forms of reason and the *carte blanche* nature of postmodernism, and its subsequent necessity in application, by insisting that “life...is more than logic. Not that there is no place for science and reason; there is, lots of space, and there are many accompanying benefits. But there is a limit to knowledge and knowledge is never disinterested, neutral, atemporal, or aspatial...reason is never impartial.”¹³³ If reason and science are not only *in* but *of* the domain of human intelligence, it is inevitable that that arena be influenced by that very humanity which, unlike the subject of its discourse, is not static and concrete in its partiality. Therefore, a connect is made between the human intelligence, in its imperfection and contradictions, and the subject of that intelligence which we might say is discerned through a reason that is not wholly impartial. This leads

129 Ibid, 199.

130 Ibid.

131 James H. Olthuis, "A Vision of and for Love: Towards a Christian Post-Postmodern Worldview," *Koers - Bulletin for Christian Scholarship* 77, no. 1 (2012): 2.

132 Ibid.

133 Ibid, 3.

Olthuis to ascertain that the goal then of reason, at least from the perspective of the postmodernist, might not be to know something wholly in, of, and for itself alone but so that the human and inhuman might meet and, in doing so, understand both itself and ourselves from the perspective of ourselves – a perspective that he would say is born of love, remarking that “reason, transformed by and in the service of love, will then have an eye for difference not in order to close it down or marginalize it, but in order to approach and connect with it, and let it be.”¹³⁴

The idea above, that postmodernity embraces the difference, cooperation, and meeting between what we can attempt to reason and the limitations of our unknowing, leads directly into Olthuis' explanations of the applicability of postmodernism for the understanding of God. He says that “postmodernism attends to and makes room for the invisible, the unconscious, the emotional, all the non-rational ways of knowing.”¹³⁵ In a distinct way it harkens back to patristic theologians, such as our subject Cyril, who are more than content that there are those elements of the nature of God, Christ, redemption, and the Trinity which are necessarily unknowable to us because they represent a mystery beyond the comprehension of our rational faculties. Postmodernism does not run from the inability for definition and explanation but embraces it; Olthuis says that “whereas for Modernism, the fact that God is unthinkable, unprovable and unrepresentable proved the irrationality, inadequacy and irreality of faith and God, for Postmodernism, the same features point to an excess beyond the reaches of reason. Suddenly the reality of God in the universe is no longer so outrageous. Suddenly there is authentic space for faith, miracles, and grace.”¹³⁶

If, therefore, postmodernity allows for the inexplicable and that which cannot be reasoned, the eschatological mission of not only Christ, but the individual, is more readily “understandable” - in that it is not necessarily meant to be understood, but to be enacted without understanding completely; which you might say is the basis of faith and a keen difference semantically between “faith” and “belief.” However, similarly to what we have seen in the section on Lonergan, this faith is (and must be) enacted in and as a form of freedom – a freedom to suffer, a freedom to not comprehend, a freedom to have faith in the unbelievable. Johann-Albrecht Meylahn says, in “Called into the Freedom of Christ in a Postmodern Age and the Moral Debate,” that “this is the freedom not of the possible (of the present), not an essential or subjective freedom, but the freedom of the impossible which grants space for the impossible to be revealed as possible.”¹³⁷ Postmodernity would say that part of this “freedom of the impossible” is suffering; a suffering which is hard to understand unless you have faith in the ultimate redemption of mankind through Christ and that this current suffering is due to our being “joint heirs with Christ to share in his sufferings for the redemption of the world.”¹³⁸ It is a tough pill to swallow – there are many unanswerable questions to our suffering and an enormous need to have faith in a God that is physically absent from our lives, but this is in fact the call of the “impossible” and the root of faith born out of freedom, as Meylahn insists, “eschatological freedom is not an essential freedom nor a freedom of presence discovered in the self, but a freedom which calls one into the promise of the impossible.”¹³⁹

134 Ibid, 5.

135 Ibid.

136 Ibid.

137 Johann-Albrecht Meylahn, "Called into the Freedom of Christ in a Postmodern Age and the Moral Debate," *Verbum Et Ecclesia* 26, no. 3 (2005): 752.

138 Olthuis, 7.

139 Meylahn, 741.

John D. Caputo, particularly in his work *Hermeneutics: Facts and Interpretation in the Age of Information*, does not provide us with theological answers, or even the questions we should be asking; instead the philosopher turned theologian outlines the use of interpretation as a means to find the correct questions to the answers we seek. As a Derridian, Caputo promotes this interpretation through the means of deconstructionism – the idea that we have always, and will always, reinterpret that which was once known before to create new interpretations which, in turn, are themselves open and expecting of their own breaking down and reinterpretation. Caputo says that deconstruction “is the theory that all our beliefs and practices are constructions, and that whatever is constructed is de-constructible, and that whatever is deconstructible is also re-constructable, which would mean that all our beliefs and practices are *re-interpretable*.”¹⁴⁰

It is important to note that there are both benefits and drawbacks to the utilization of the theory of deconstruction. Chief among its limitations is that deconstruction runs the risk of pushing meaning into abstraction - if everything is interpretable all the way down to the individual level, what can really be known? Or perhaps put more simply, what use is knowledge to the knower (or anyone else) if it is so individualized? The solution lay in viewing deconstructionism as a hermeneutical lens as opposed to any ideological framework; just as we might interpret meaning through a feminist, Indigenous, or cinematic lens in order to garner an understanding that fits a particular wanton criteria, so too can we use deconstructionism as a lens to view meaning. By doing so we remain aware of the plethora of concrete or communal interpretations whilst also allowing for an individual one; this individual interpretation, created by breaking down and recreating meaning, doesn't have to subsist other meanings but can live alongside them as one of many hermeneutical interpretations.

For Caputo, there is a danger in assigning to anything a concrete truth as these truths are only beholden to a personal or collective belief at a particular set time and circumstance. What we view as authentic, Caputo reflects, is “always an inflection, an appropriation, a repetition, of the average inauthentic everydayness in which we first find ourselves in the world.”¹⁴¹ The difference being that postmodernity embraces this function of authenticity without discrediting it; it is not to say that we cannot find and hold truths but to find and hold them with the understanding and acceptance that their very function is fleeting. Therefore in the postmodern view, authenticity, authority, and dogmatics exist as very real but non-static entities; it is a paradox of sorts, but for the postmodern there is no issue in accepting something as true, established, and unchanging as long as we accept that they may be also in the process of becoming untrue, broken down, and changed. What's more, for Caputo, this opening up of the dimension of choice and change is an essential component of the Christian experience of free will, the alternative being disastrous, remarking that “to have a destiny...is to be open to inherited possibilities, not a deterministic closing; it is freedom, not fatalism.”¹⁴²

Caputo's theological insistence on a re-interpretation allows us to view the humanity of Christ, particularly in the theology of Cyril of Alexandria, as re-interpretable and reflective of a more contemporary understanding of the concept of humanity and personhood. Therefore, the lens of Caputo provides us a way in which to discern new interpretations on "old" ideas. Not only that, he suggests that this shift toward the contemporary is informed by a radical change to the way in which we discern what is of importance in our research and discovery, commenting that “philosophers in the past were more interested in the creative act than in the re-creative one, more interested in authors and artists than in

140 John D. Caputo, *Hermeneutics: Facts and Interpretation in the Age of Information* (UK: Pelican Books, 2018), 9.

141 Ibid, 53.

142 Ibid, 79.

readers and critics, but postmodern thinkers insist that how things are heard and understood, how they are interpreted and reproduced, is an essential ingredient in their history.”¹⁴³

It is important to note that Caputo is aware of the *laissez-faire* reputation of postmodernity but insists that it has its borders as well and, in comparing it to a game, says that “without the rules, we would not have more play but no play at all.”¹⁴⁴ Instead, Caputo sees the work of interpretation as an application, an active process that works upon what has come before. He says that “there is no explication without application, no such thing as an application-free interpretation. The field of interpretation, we might say, is fieldwork.”¹⁴⁵ That being said, it must also be noted that the so-called rules are interpreted differently over history and cultures and Christianity is not immune to this spectrum of interpretation. Postmodernity does not deny these historical and cultural changes, nor condemn them for being “outside the rules” though “the tension between the desire to preserve the substance of Christian faith and the will to render it accessible to contemporary audiences has become palpable,” as the theologian Jean-Pierre Fortin notes. He continues by asserting that an interpretable worldview, through the lens of postmodernism, is a prescriptive measure in understanding and embracing a plethora of nuanced differences, that there is “the need to elaborate suitable transpositions that would bridge the gap separating the traditional formulations from the postmodern worldview.”¹⁴⁶

At the same time, Caputo urges us toward the realization that what we view as authoritative and unchanging itself was a product of a process of interpretation and refinement, so why then do we stop? Speaking on the idea of the authority of the text or artifact, he says “the so-called original has not dropped from the sky; it, too, is the effect of everything that precedes it, of the systems of signification of which it was a part. There never was anything that was originally original. (There is nothing – never anything – outside or without some conditioning context or another.)”¹⁴⁷ This might be a controversial point for some, but its obvious nature is almost so simple that we forget; every truth we have come to has been the product of a series of truths and interpretations leading to this new truth. What Caputo dares us is to continue this very method of interpretation from which theology owes all its current “truths.” This, for Caputo, is the goal of postmodern theology now – an appropriate device, fitting of its current readership and audience, for the continued process of (re) interpretation. This is the fieldwork he speaks of; the continued search and application of these interpretations, saying that “we seek to tweak what is already understood in order to learn something new, by exposing this text to a world that was unknown to its author, the world around us now, and, still more importantly, to expose it to the future, to which the text ultimately belongs.”¹⁴⁸

Now let us turn to Jacques Derrida's notion called “the unconditional” which Caputo uses to describe his personal beliefs in a divine, himself calling the unconditional “the gift.” The unconditional has no precept or a priori contingency for its existence. It is that which doesn't ask *why*? Caputo says that “the pure gift does not exist” but instead “insists.”¹⁴⁹ The sacrifice of Jesus is the unconditional/gift as it is given without expectation of reward to the giver and that it must be this way as in order to truly

143 Ibid, 121.

144 Ibid, 93.

145 Ibid, 112.

146 Jean-Pierre Fortin, "Symbolism in Weakness: Jesus Christ for the Postmodern Age," *The Heythrop Journal* LVIII (2017): 64.

147 Caputo, 135.

148 Ibid, 123.

149 Caputo, John D., *Hoping Against Hope: (Confessions of a Postmodern Pilgrim)*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 50.

be a gift there can be no expectation or conditions placed upon the granting of it; “the pure gift remains under the radar of our conscious goals and intentions. It sustains itself in a field of anonymity. Once it becomes visible, intentional, it begins to annul itself.”¹⁵⁰ While Jesus had reservations, at the moment of expectation these diminished into a full acceptance of sacrifice of self without further question.

In the context of the personhood of Jesus, Caputo can enlighten us when he speaks of destiny - though we often look at the *death* of Jesus as the fulfillment of his destiny “to have a destiny...is to be open to inherited possibilities, not a deterministic closing; it is freedom, not fatalism”¹⁵¹ so it stands to reason that the death was just one possible fate of Jesus and, therefore, even if it's not a choice it is one of many possible fates known to Him. The fact that Jesus accepts it is a key moment as it is the instance where the sacrifice is agreed upon and Jesus' previous reluctance is the component to understanding a duality of will and, ultimately, the implication of the sacrifice – had his sacrifice been unprotested it would have diminished its impact.

This acquiescence on the part of Christ points to one of Caputo's most notable insistences: the “weakness” of God in Christ's up-taking the human form. In “Symbolism in Weakness: Jesus Christ for the Postmodern Age,” Jean-Pierre Fortin says that “the doctrine of a vulnerable God dying on a cross speaks to postmodern civilization...Jesus Christ infuses transcendence into the realm of immanence by assuming the human predicament to its bitter end.”¹⁵² Similar to understandings of “obedience” as discussed in the section above on Lonergan, Caputo too views obedience as way in which to identify the action of (or reaction to) Christ in humanity, as Fortin states “Caputo finds in the category of suffering obedience a privileged channel to describe God's action in human existence.”¹⁵³ The weakness of God therefore is in the subjecting of himself, and therefore ourselves, to a freely formed obedient will that accepts suffering toward redemption. This, combined with Jesus' own personal discernment in the Garden of Gethsemane, leads Fortin to assert that “with Jesus, God is found at work within radical weakness and pluralism.”¹⁵⁴

As we learned from Meylahn in the sections above, for a “postmodern” relationship with Christ we are called toward “the impossible” - to believe the unbelievable and unbelieve at the same time, as Fortin notes that “for Caputo, then, genuine faith always involves invincible ignorance and the persistence of doubt in the human heart in regards to the legitimacy of any particular set of beliefs. All committed believers are therefore simultaneously unbelievers insofar as they take a critical distance from their particular beliefs.”¹⁵⁵ What is being described is the essence of faith, both in and outside the realm of postmodernity; recognizing a limit to understanding, the presence of all possibilities (even the undesired possibility of the non-existence of God), but pursuing faith in spite of all these factors. It is asserting, proudly, a powerlessness exemplified by Jesus, as Fortin says “the crucified Christ, the Christ who dies on the cross, completely deprived of worldly power, constitutes the core of post-modern Christian theology.”¹⁵⁶ Pushing aside, once again, the concreteness of rationality, Fortin says that “Christ's powerlessness is not reducible to mere negativity” but instead, by positioning himself as fully human and offering up his being as a sacrifice, his “personal weakness also unveils the infinite power

150 Caputo, *Hoping Against Hope*, 51.

151 Caputo, *Hermeneutics*, 79.

152 Fortin, 64.

153 Ibid.

154 Ibid.

155 Ibid, 66.

156 Ibid, 67.

of divine love.”¹⁵⁷ In this sense love as: a mystery, a theological principle, that which connects us to Christ and each to one another in community, has an inherent weakness in its subsistence and non-subjectivity and its strength in vulnerability. Christ, as the archetype of this form of love displays fully the power of his weakness and vulnerability in the service of redemption, which is in fact a communal action and process which we participate in by faith. This faith in Jesus, Fortin says, “requires that we, like him, fully embrace the measure of our infinite vulnerability.”¹⁵⁸

Recontextualizing an Imitation of Christ

Thomas à Kempis' famous 15th century work, *The Imitation of Christ*, was for several centuries after publication said, colloquially, to be the “2nd most read book in the world,” after the bible. True or not, it has undoubtedly left an indelible mark on the interpretation of how adherents can be more “Christ-like” in their lives. The goal of this section is not to ascertain an idea of the imitation of Christ as understood in the late middle ages/early modern period, but instead how it might be understood in contemporary culture. That said, due to the inarguable influence of Kempis' work it would be a mistake to not at least look at some of the text's contributions with the understanding that it has (and continues to) shaped much of how we understand *imitatio christi* up to, and including, the modern day. The book is in part a list of prescriptive measures of seeking the interior life through the imitation of Christ while in other parts a dialogue between the imagined Voice of Christ and a Disciple of the Lord, including a focused study of the eucharist. Kempis' work, especially the first two books, is indicative of it's time, with its various suggestions to turn away from the world, renounce the sensible, and retreat to the interior life of prayer. As Kempis scholar R. Jay Magill Jr says, “the general gist...is to make oneself meek, beat oneself down, kill the yearning self, and make it deserving of the Kingdom of Heaven. This can only be achieved by turning away from the world.”¹⁵⁹ This turning away from the world was not only to shelter oneself from that world but a means to enter into a more fulfilling life of grace and communication with Christ. Magill notes the harsh advice of Kempis in stating that the author “suggests that the best way to begin spiritual renewal is to hate the flesh and the world, infested as it is with hierarchies, jealousies, animosities, power struggles, and desperate quests for fame and riches.”¹⁶⁰

While Kempis' diagnosis and prescription may seem harsh (especially for the contemporary adherent), his suggestions about what it is that might be keeping us from a more fulfilling spiritual life are not so foreign to us – in fact it may be said that, in the modern age of social media, hustle-culture, and unfiltered greed, these “infestations” have only become more prevalent. How is one then to follow Kempis' views on the imitation of Christ when it is increasingly difficult to shun the world? A first step forward would be to embrace humility and self-sufficiency in order to disdain the need for constant recognition; Kempis says that “the humble live in continuous peace, while in the hearts of the proud are envy and frequent anger”¹⁶¹ and that “a man ought to root himself so firmly in God that he will not need the consolations of men.”¹⁶² An idea that we will see grow in the coming paragraphs, the transformative quality of a life spent in Christ, is also relayed by Kempis in less extreme terms when he says that “as an iron cast into fire loses its rust and becomes glowing white, so he who turns completely to God is

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 67.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 76.

¹⁵⁹ R. Jay Magill Jr., "Turn Away the World: How a Curious Fifteenth-Century Spiritual Guidebook Shaped the Contours of the Reformation and Taught Readers to Turn Inward," *Christianity & Literature* Vol. 67, no. 1 (2017): 41.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (Garden City, New York: Dover Publications, 2003), 6.

¹⁶² Ibid, 9.

stripped of his sluggishness and changed into a new man.”¹⁶³ Kempis also notes the importance of the cross, but is willing to allow a deviation from the oft-cited physicality of the suffering of Christ in place of a metaphorical, interior suffering. As well, he notes that all individuals have a “cross to bear” but that this suffering is, in a way, a gift as it denotes the necessity of restraint and obedience, saying that “you will find a cross in everything, and everywhere you must have patience if you would have peace within and merit an eternal crown.”¹⁶⁴ The most strikingly postmodern statement that Kempis makes is in his allowance that each individual will come to the cross and their communion with Christ in and of their own way (with the assumption, of course, that they follow scripture, receive eucharist, etc.) and that practical religious practice insists, at least in part, on a sense of individualism, saying that “not everyone can have the same devotion. One exactly suits this person, another that.”¹⁶⁵

Jumping ahead a few centuries we encounter another thinker with whom we are now familiar, Søren Kierkegaard; particularly his views on the imitation of Christ as disseminated by Joshua Cockayne in his articles “Imitation and Contemporaneity” and “The Imitation Game.” Cockayne expresses that there is similarity between Kierkegaard and Kempis’ views on the proper imitation of Christ (and the Christian form) with but a subtle difference, noting that “like Thomas, Kierkegaard claims that imitation requires an individual to draw near to Christ through the experience of Christ’s presence, yet unlike Thomas, the purpose of this experience is that a person comes to know the value of God’s grace.”¹⁶⁶ Kierkegaard likes to stress the immediate, transformative, qualities of encountering Christ via imitation. Cockayne likens this strategy to the popularity of the contemporary wristbands that ask the wearer to contemplate “What Would Jesus Do?”¹⁶⁷ - likewise, Kierkegaard insists on imitation, not only in action, but in the intention and meaning that the WWJD question begs. If we are to break “imitation” down into subdivided types, the type that Kierkegaard is interested in is that which has the power to adhere to, and ultimately exist within, grace. Cockayne says that “often when we think about the imitation of Christ, the kind of behaviour replication discussed is [emulation and mimicry]. The problem with this...is that replicating someone’s actions is insufficient for the radical change to oneself which is required for the process of sanctification.”¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, the author insists that this more Kierkegaardian imitation of Christ is now a process by which we participate in grace and “becomes an integral part of how we are redeemed from sin, begin the process of sanctification, and enter into union with God. The believer now has a direct access to God through Christ made possible by the presence of the Spirit.”¹⁶⁹ Therefore, the change that Kierkegaard wishes to see in the adherent, in imitating Christ, is not simply in action, word, and deed, but “rather, a metaphysical change in which she both acts like and becomes like Christ”¹⁷⁰ which leads to a more developed union with God.

The contemporary theologian, SueAnn Johnson, says that modern Christological research is “generally, far less concerned with soteriology from an historic perspective, that is, how Jesus Christ has already saved humanity, than with the question of how Jesus’ life can inspire transformation of one’s present situation.”¹⁷¹ This preceding statement seems an echo of Kierkegaard’s thoughts as

163 Ibid, 32.

164 Ibid, 41.

165 Ibid, 16.

166 Joshua Cockayne, "Imitation and Contemporaneity: Kierkegaard and the Imitation of Christ," *The Heythrop Journal* LXIII (2022): 558.

167 Joshua Cockayne, "The Imitation Game: Becoming Imitators of Christ," *Religious Studies* 53 (2017): 3.

168 Ibid, 5.

169 Ibid, 7.

170 Ibid, 9.

171 SueAnn Johnson, "How is the Body of Christ a Meaningful Symbol for the Contemporary Christian Community?"

interpreted by Cockayne when the author remarks that “what contemporary religious believers miss, Kierkegaard maintains, is that the Christian is required to both act and to transform.”¹⁷² One of the major stumbling blocks in this transformation, for Kierkegaard, is that adherents continue to view Christ in “historicity at a distance and thereby only admire him”¹⁷³ and, as Cockayne says, “for Kierkegaard, the purpose of reading Scripture is not primarily to gain historical knowledge of Christ, but rather, to relate personally to Christ and to cultivate the kind of contemporaneity which is important for imitation.”¹⁷⁴ The point is clear: as living, breathing, deciding beings, if we are to imitate Christ properly it must be an imitation of a living, breathing, deciding Christ. Cockayne says that “Kierkegaard clearly regards Christ as a living person whom the individual can draw close to by experiencing his presence. Thus, the experience of being contemporary with Christ should be understood in these terms also.”¹⁷⁵ Furthermore, Kierkegaard is in accord with Lonergan and Caputo in viewing obedience as a key component in the paralleling of Christ in order to properly imitate Him, saying that “the imitator must strive to be like Christ not just when it is in her own interest, but also, in their struggle with God's will, in their obedience to death and their willingness to become nothing”¹⁷⁶ and that “it is the submission to God through an experience of Christ's presence which is primary for a person's imitation of Christ and not the human striving towards suffering or martyrdom.”¹⁷⁷

How then are we to ascertain this imitation and transformative presence of Christ? Christopher M. Hadley, SJ, insists the answer to that question is faith, and not just any faith but faith like Christ's: “archetypal faith serves as the foundation for the Christian experience of faith as growth in self-knowledge in relation to God and the world.”¹⁷⁸ What's more, Hadley is very Kierkegaardian in his assertion that this faith be based on a current and immediate relationship with a “living” and transformative Christ. He says that “the actual Jesus who walked the earth two thousand years ago no longer exists and is thus inaccessible to any speculation, regardless of method” and while he recognizes the importance that may lay in the historical approach and implications to areas within the study of Christology, Hadley says that “neither the ontic-actual Jesus of two thousand years ago nor the Jesus of historical reconstruction lies open for a consideration of Jesus's human experience as the incarnate Word of the Father.”¹⁷⁹ Again, on the goal of Jesus being a conduit for the transformation of the individual, Hadley doesn't place the emphasis on Christ in history but Christ in self-reflection, in the present.

If we are to place our faith in an unseen present force then one of the primary elements of this faith must be hope, which in itself is a quality of the imitation of Christ, as Hadley notes, “if Jesus is the pioneer and the perfecter of faith, and if the definition of faith includes hope, then it would seem Jesus does have hope.”¹⁸⁰ Hope, perhaps more than many of the other qualities of faith, insists upon facing the unknown with a steadfast insistence toward the abolishment of doubt and fear – a feat that Christ was able to achieve once his moment of wavering was complete in Gethsemane. This hopeful quality was profoundly human as it, by necessity, assumes a lack in knowledge of the future - which in

Feminist Theology Vol. 17, no. 2 (2009): 210.

172 Cockayne, "Imitation and Contemporaneity," 555.

173 Ibid, 560.

174 Ibid, 556.

175 Ibid, 562.

176 Ibid, 554.

177 Ibid, 562.

178 Christopher M. Hadley, "The Archetypal Faith of Christ," *Theological Studies* Vol. 81, no. 3 (2020): 672.

179 Ibid, 674.

180 Ibid, 676.

the case of Christ included, most importantly, the carrying out of his soteriological mission. This hope of Christ's is seen again in his dying moments upon the cross, Hadley adding that "the faith that Jesus practices in a human mode when he faces his mission to the Cross allows for the theological virtue of hope, and even implicates it. Hope requires a certain ethical and ascetical attitude on the part of the human person, but it is also always based on the assurance of a relationship."¹⁸¹ In the case of Jesus, this assurity based on a relationship is seen between Him and God the Father; a Father he petitions to in Gethsemane for his own salvation and a Father he trusts in the (at least partial) mystery of his mission. The imitation of Christ begs the adherent to likewise develop a trusting relationship with Christ that is built on the assurances of hope. For Jesus, and perhaps more importantly for the adherent, hope allows us to resist a wave of rationality that might tell us "all is lost, look at the facts" in favour of accepting a dimension of faith that accepts what John D. Caputo might phrase as "the call of the unconditional," the tiny spark of hope that "doesn't ask *why*." Hadley himself notes that "driving too hard a wedge between faith and knowledge does not allow for the truly personal and relational dimension of knowledge of God of which the Bible speaks and which is ultimately the only relevant kind of knowledge for Christian believers."¹⁸² This imitation of Christ, the foregoing of reason and empiricism in favour of a hopeful faith, is not necessarily easy - the solace being that it was not easy for Christ either; he suffered great uncertainty and anxiety about his mission before its goals and process came into full view, which in itself opens the door to a fruitful imitation. In possessing both divinity and humanity, understood as one person, Christ was able to experience both the architecture for carrying-out of his mission whilst that mission remained something obscured, at least for a time, as "by being the Logos and having this *a priori* unobjectified knowledge of himself, Jesus experiences himself as a mystery."¹⁸³

181 Ibid, 677.

182 Ibid, 684.

183 Ibid, 688.

Conclusions

In "Suffering Impassibly," author J. Warren Smith says that "the primary effect of the Incarnation upon the Word is that the Word experiences the weakness of human nature,"¹⁸⁴ which I believe sums up much of what this thesis has been about: mankind and its inherent weakness. In Cyril of Alexandria we are shown how Jesus was fully man and had to answer to that humanity in his displays of emotion and uncertainty. The Garden of Gethsemane scene further explored the weakness of man when Christ felt anxiety and fear - which Kierkegaard regards as an essential component in becoming fully human and, in that way, divine. We later see, in both Lonergan and Caputo, ideas of the weakness of God and how meaning changes, in part, due the need for re-contextualization of this weakness. What we are ultimately left with is an image of Christ that begins to look much more like ourselves and therefore a figure to which we can relate in our own emotional sufferings. I see this emotionally relational component of Christ as an opportunity for contemporary audiences of Christ, believers and non-believers alike, to reinterpret how an imitation of Christ might be of a beneficial nature to their own lives. I can also envision an academic turn toward the psychological understandings of Christ as relational, and its altered significance, as a contemporary avenue to further investigate, in this context, the significance of the Passion in theological studies.

I do not wish for this thesis to sound overly apologetic; I believe that the ideas I have laid out here have application beyond the adherent into secular society as the core tenet is one that has been utilized by multiple groups in the past few years and it is the idea of "me too:" whether it be in light of the sexual assault allegations of Hollywood or the loneliness of the UK's ageing population, it is undeniable that a primary psychological help to those who suffer is to know that they are not alone, nor unique, in their suffering. What I have simply done here is to posit that Christ embodies this idea of "me too" through his suffering. As well, the methods in which He came to understand that suffering, as inevitable to his life and pathway to salvation, makes the figure of Christ a clear choice as an icon/paragon/platonic ideal/model/what have you, in which to look to as a means to share one's own suffering and receive consolation.

This thesis has made the effort to combine a variety of ideas from theologians and scholars with the end goal of illuminating a primary idea with an immediate application: we share in suffering with Christ and through that participation are granted an ideal in which to strive. We are, like Christ, distinctly human and subject to the inevitable tortures of the mind. However, we are not alone in our loneliness because Christ too was lonely. We are not abandoned to our grief just as Christ was not abandoned to His. If we allow ourselves to understand that the weakness of Christ was his greatest strength and a key component of his salvific mission, we too can transpose this idea to recognize in ourselves the strength and emancipatory power of our own weaknesses coaxing us toward personal salvation.

¹⁸⁴ Smith, 467.

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