

CHAPTER ELEVEN

EARLY CHRISTOLOGY

Greek Terms

We conclude our reflections on the Creed's statement on Jesus by moving beyond the Newer Testament in order to examine what Christians had to say about Jesus in the three and a half centuries after the Newer Testament up to the Council of Chalcedon (451AD).

The first thing to note is that the Newer Testament remained normative for the Christian community in its understanding of Jesus. This is because the Newer Testament witnesses to the actual experiences of those who knew Jesus prior to his death. Christians continued to experience Jesus through the gift of his Spirit, but only those who knew Jesus were in a position to recognize these post-crucifixion experiences as being experiences of Jesus. Only they were in a position to recognise him. Later Christians continued to have experiences. They linked these experiences with Jesus on the word of the first generation of Christians. Their understanding would go beyond that of the Newer Testament, but it would never contradict it.

Since the second and later generations of Christians belonged for the most part to cultures other than Jewish, they needed to go beyond the language and images of the Newer Testament as they strove to understand Jesus and to convey their understanding to others. The Greeks brought to Christianity a special kind of inquiring mind seeking explanatory language in which to communicate what it was that Christians believed. This necessary task was, as we will see, hampered by the many different philosophies that abounded during these early centuries. At times thinkers from the various schools were unaware that they were working from false assumptions, and it took time for this to become clear. At times people were arguing about words rather than about reality, as they had not sufficiently defined their terms.

We misunderstand their words if we interpret them abstractly, for their contemplation was of Jesus, and their insights came from within a living, worshipping community. Underneath the complexities of misunderstandings, hidden and mistaken assumptions, oversights and false directions (not to mention lies, deception and hypocrisy) that interfered with their journey to the truth, as it interferes with ours, we will be looking for the prevailing movement of faith, the insights and convictions that underlay their search, confident that these will assist us in avoiding error and in clarifying the meaning of Jesus for us today.

Two movements had a special danger for Christian communities as they strove to keep their faith in Jesus true. The first is 'docetism' (from the Greek: *dokeô*: 'seem'). In the polytheistic world of the early centuries people had little trouble adding another god to the pantheon of deities that they worshipped. Since emperors were thought of as divine, there was no fundamental problem in accepting Jesus as divine. The earliest heresy did not deny Jesus' divinity, but the reality of his humanity. Some imagined him as God who took on the appearance of a human body, and so *seemed* to be human. Against this movement, faithful Christians asserted the full reality of the human Jesus.

The second prevailing heresy asserted that it was impossible for there to be direct communication between the transcendent Deity and creatures. Creation was thought of as the work of an inferior emanation from the Deity. In this heresy (Arianism) Jesus was thought of as the incarnation not of God but of this lower divine emanation (the 'demiurge').

Irenaeus (died 202) wrote a massive refutation of these heresies in his '*Against the Heresies*' (Latin: '*Adversus Haereses*'). The full translation of the Greek title is '*On the detection and refutation of knowledge (gnosis) falsely so called*'. Irenaeus repeated the Church's belief and insisted on the unity of this belief throughout the Christian world. He knew that to deny the reality of Jesus' humanity or to lose Jesus of Nazareth in the fanciful speculations of gnosticism would be to lose what is revealed of God in Jesus. If we do not see Jesus properly we will fail to see the one he addressed as 'Father'. However, because his language remained within the symbolic horizon of the scriptures his opponents had little difficulty in altering their words and coming up with new and more far-fetched speculations. Irenaeus has been likened to a boxer who keeps on defending that part of the body that has just been hit.

Early in the 3rd century, Hippolytus, a Roman priest, expressed the Christian faith in his '*Apostolic Tradition*'. He also wrote a treatise '*Against Noetus*'. Noetus was a writer from the East who, to preserve monotheism, identified the Father as suffering in Jesus. At the same time Tertullian of Carthage wrote a treatise '*Against Praxeus*' – who had similar ideas to Noetus.

These authors kept quoting the Newer Testament. However, it was becoming clear that the language of Scripture was proving insufficient to refute heresy. The same could be said of using the language of the naive realism of the Stoic schools of philosophy. The writings of Irenaeus, Hippolytus and Tertullian demonstrated the need to find a new language to express more clearly the relationship between Jesus of Nazareth and the God whom he addressed as 'Father'.

A theological school flourished in Alexandria towards the end of the second century and into the third. A leading figure was Clement, who (rightly) insisted on the impossibility of confining God within our human conceptions.

'We reach some slight understanding of the Omnipotent. Not that we understand what it is, but rather what it is not ... The Omnipotent cannot be named. If at times we do name Him in an applied sense, as the One, or the Good, or Mind, or Absolute Being, or Father, or God, or Creator, or Lord, we do so not as uttering his proper name. Rather, because we do not know his proper name, we use these other beautiful names in order to focus our thought on them to prevent us from going astray. For, although these names taken singly do not signify God, taken all together, they suggest the power of the Omnipotent. It remains, therefore, that it is by the grace of God, and only through his Word, that we come to understand the unknown God himself. This is the meaning of Paul's 'To the Unknown God' recalled by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles [17:23]' (*Stromata* V.12.82).

An even more significant figure in the Alexandrian School was Origen (185-254AD). He recognised the metaphorical, symbolic nature of Hebrew imagery and so the need to read the Scriptures aware of the symbols, not treating them as factual prose:

'People hold false opinions and make impious or ignorant assertions about God because scripture is not understood in its spiritual sense, but is interpreted according to the bare letter' (*De Principiis* 4.2).

Council of Nicea

A major problem arises with the writings of the Alexandian School – a problem that we will find in the early Councils of the Church. Growing to understand Jesus and his relationship to God and to us necessarily invites us to contemplate the mystery of God. The danger inherent in the thinking of the Greek Schools was to begin, not with the data of the Newer Testament, not with the man Jesus who points towards the mystery of God, but to proceed from speculation about God as though knowledge of God comes first, and to proceed from this ‘knowledge’ to the man Jesus. The debates show little or no appreciation of the human psyche of Jesus. They spoke of Jesus’ ‘nature’, a term taken from the empirical sciences. What a being does indicates what a being is. Jesus’ actions revealed God. They also revealed a man. Jesus, therefore, was spoken of as having two natures. In the thinking of the Alexandrian School, however, the two seem quite mixed, something that introduced confusion into a true appreciation of Jesus’ humanity, constantly mixing the divine and the human. with the danger that Jesus would be seen as a hybrid, part God and part man, rather than as a man who revealed, in a perfect human way, the God who was giving God’s Self to creation and to the human race.

The dogmas of faith that issued from the early Councils (as we will shortly see) help direct our reflections concerning Jesus in a true direction, and we can be confident that they do point us towards the Mystery of God, but they are not meant to be the starting point of our reflections. This can only be Jesus the man as presented to us in the Gospels.

Another significant theological school was in Antioch. A leading figure was Lucian (240-312) who insisted on the need to check so-called ‘spiritual meanings’ by careful linguistic and literary analysis.

In Alexandria Sabellius taught that the ‘Father’, the ‘Word’ and the ‘Spirit’ (all expressions found in the Newer Testament in relation to God) were simply different aspects of the one God. Arius (a disciple of Lucian of Antioch) was determined to maintain the distinction between Jesus and the Father while acknowledging that the divine Word was made flesh in Jesus. He opposed Sabellius, but taught that the ‘Word’ who was ‘made flesh’ in Jesus was not the transcendent Deity, but rather an emanation from the Deity (and therefore logically a creature). This struck at the very heart of Christianity, driving a wedge between Jesus and God, such that Jesus revealed the Word, but God remained as unknown and unrevealed as ever. Arius’s ideas proved very popular.

The Council of Nicaea 325

Constantine became sole emperor in the West in 312, and by 324 was sole master of the Roman Empire. He saw Christianity as a tool for unity and was determined to heal the schism between those following Arius and those opposed to him. In 325 he summoned the bishops of the East (about three hundred of them) to Nicaea on the Eastern shore of the Bosphorus, opposite Constantinople. The first thing to note about this Council – considered the First Ecumenical Council of the Christian Church – is that it was called by the emperor Constantine. Only 17 of the bishops attending the Council were followers of Arius. Their importance, however, went beyond their numbers, as they were led by Eusebius, Bishop of Nicomedia (the Eastern Capital of the emperor Diocletian, on the eastern shore of the Sea of Marmara, just north of Nicea). This Diocesan See would become the Imperial See of Constantinople in 338.

Eusebius baptised Constantine and retained close connections with his son and successor. About 30 bishops, including Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria, and the handful of bishops from the West, including Hosios from Cordova in Spain, were firmly against Arius and in favour of the Creed that came out of the Council. The rest, the vast majority of the bishops, including another Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea (author of the first history of the Church), were against Arius, but reluctant to commit themselves to the Nicene Creed. The Emperor was determined to push the formula through. He wanted unity. He was helped by the evasive answers given by Arius, and eventually all but two of the bishops signed the Creed.

Most of the bishops were reluctant because the Nicene formula introduced into the creed non-scriptural philosophic terms the meaning of which was unclear to them. Communities were divided over these words and their meaning for the rest of the fourth and throughout the fifth century. The formula speaks of Jesus in biblical terms as ‘the only-begotten Son of God, begotten by the Father’, and goes on to state that he is ‘of the being (Greek: *ousia*) of the Father’, and ‘of one being (Greek: *homoousios*) with the Father.’ The formula goes on to condemn those who claim that Jesus, the Son of God, was made from a ‘subsistence’ (Greek: *hypostasis*) or ‘being’ (Greek: *ousia*) other than that of the Father.

One problem with this was that the term ‘*homoousios*’ had been condemned in 272AD, because, as used by Paul of Samosata, it seemed to identify the Son and the Father. Another problem was uncertainty about what the creed meant by using ‘*ousia*’ and ‘*hypostasis*’ for the one underlying reality. Let us look first at the term *hypostasis*. It is translated into Latin by either ‘*subsistentia*’ or ‘*substantia*’. It is a metaphysical term referring to that which we come to ‘understand’ through insight into what ‘stands under’ what we experience by our senses. It answers the question ‘What is it?, as distinct from ‘What does it appear to be?’. In speaking of Jesus the insight is one that is enlightened by faith, is expressed in a concept, and is asserted as true (‘real’) in a judgment. Jesus’ *hypostasis* is what we understand Jesus to be. It answers the question ‘Who is Jesus?’

The term *ousia* is sometimes used to refer to an abstract, conceptual category, like ‘humanity’ or ‘divinity’. At other times it used to refer to an actual existing reality or being, like Jesus or God the Father. This lends obscurity to the term ‘*homoousios*’. Does it mean that Jesus and God the Father belong in the same category – which would imply that there are two gods, not one? Does it mean that Jesus and God the Father are the one being. This preserves monotheism, but implies that the Father is the Son – something that was condemned in 272. As intended by those who created the formula, it meant neither of the above, but one could hardly blame the bishops for complaining that they did not know what they were signing.

What did the Council of Nicea achieve?

Despite the lack of clarity in its language, the Council of Nicea did preserve what Arianism would have lost: the assurance that in knowing Jesus it is God that we are knowing, and that it is with God that we are reconciled when we are in union with Jesus. Jesus’ words were not just words about God, they were words from God, God’s Word. The prophets of ancient Israel spoke what they claimed was God’s word, but they did so imperfectly.

Council of Nicea

Jesus ‘fulfilled’ their words, brought to perfection their part-insights. This continued in the preaching of Jesus’ disciples. Paul could write:

‘We constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God’s word, which is also at work in you believers’(1Thessalonians 2:13).

Jesus brought to perfection the words of God spoken by the prophets of Israel. He also brought to perfection (‘fulfilled’) what the second century martyr, Justin, in his open letter to the Roman Emperor, refers to as ‘seeds of the word’: the inspired wisdom of the Greek world.

‘Whatever lawyers or philosophers uttered well,
they elaborated by finding and contemplating some part of the Word.
But since they did not know the whole of the Word, which is Christ,
they often contradicted themselves.

Whatever things were rightly said among people are the property of us Christians.
For next to God we worship and love the Word
who is from the unbegotten and ineffable God.

We do this also he became human for our sakes,
so that, sharing in our sufferings, he might also bring us healing.

For all the writers were able to see realities in an obscure way
through the sowing of the Word implanted in them.

But the seed and the imitation imparted according to capacity is one thing,
and quite another is the thing itself of which there is the participation and imitation
according to the grace which is from him’(II Apologia).

The statement issued by the Council of Nicea declared Arius to be in error. It did not claim to comprehensively state the truth. It said ‘No’ to untrue and misleading ways of stating the relationship between Jesus and God. It aimed to give assurance to Christians that in Jesus we have not only the perfect example of human love to God, but also the true expression and assurance of God’s love towards us. From this base the Church continued to explore its understanding of the mystery of Jesus’ person, as the perfect human expression of God’s Word.

However, this first step into using the tools of Greek philosophy to clarify the articulation of faith was, as we have seen, rather clumsy. The period after the Council was one of considerable confusion. Many bishops looked for leadership to Constantine and then to his son, Constantius, whom they looked upon as God’s anointed. As already noted, the emperor was influenced by Eusebius, the leader of the Arians and bishop of the Imperial Diocese.

A large number of bishops in the East opted to avoid the ambiguities of ‘*homoousios*’ by choosing ‘*homoiousios*’, meaning that Jesus’ being is ‘like’ (not ‘the same as’) the being of God the Father. They were vigorously opposed by Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria and a staunch defender of the Nicene formula. He insisted that it was precisely ‘the divinity of the Father that is in the Son, so that whoever sees the Son sees the Father in him’(De Synodis, 52).

He favoured using '*homoousios*', but preferred to distinguish '*ousia*' (which is one in the Father and Son) from '*hypostasis*', which states their distinction. At the same time he avoided arguing about words, by allowing other terminology, so long as people were committed both to monotheism and to the acceptance of the divinity of Jesus as well as professing that the Father is not the Son.

The Council of Constantinople 381

The confusion following the Council of Nicaea led Emperor Theodosius to summon the bishops to a Council in Constantinople in 381AD. There were no bishops present from the West, and none from Egypt. Only 150 bishops attended. In spite of this narrow base, this is classified as the Second Ecumenical Council. Those present included three leading bishops from Cappadocea (Eastern Turkey): Gregory of Nazianzus, who, as bishop of Constantinople, presided over the Council; another Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, a prominent theologian; and his brother, Basil, bishop of Caesarea, a close friend of Athanasius. The Council endorsed the Nicene Creed. However, they omitted the phrase 'of the being [*ousia*]' of the Father'; they repeated the phrase 'of one being [*homoousios*]' with the Father'; and they added some phrases from Scripture. They made no reference to '*hypostasis*'.

The Creed from the earlier Council of Nicaea ended with the simple expression 'We believe in the Holy Spirit'. The bishops at the Council of Constantinople added:

'the Lord, the giver of life, proceeding from the Father, to be worshipped and glorified with the Father and the Son, who has spoken through the prophets'.

It also added:

'We believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.'

The resultant creed—the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople, but popularly referred to simply as the Nicene Creed – was included in the liturgy of the Western Church towards the end of the 8th century. See the conclusion of Chapter 5 where it and the Apostles' Creed are presented in parallel columns.

What did the Council of Constantinople achieve?

At Nicaea the direct link between Jesus and God was asserted, but what about the reality of Jesus' humanity? Athanasius himself stresses the divinity of Jesus in such a way that one looks in vain for any awareness of Jesus' human psyche. His friend Apollinaris, bishop of Laodicea, was so keen to stress Jesus' divinity that he asserted that Jesus did not have a human soul. The bishops of Constantinople declared this to be heresy. They asserted that the Word became a man, and not just 'flesh' with the divine Spirit replacing the human psyche (Catechism 471-475).

The Council also laid claim to a special spiritual authority as the Diocese of the Emperor and as 'the New Rome'. This started a power struggle between Constantinople and Rome that is still with us.

Theodore and Augustine

We turn now to two great 5th century theologians, one from the East, Theodore, bishop of Mopsuestia (died 428), and one from the West, Augustine of Hippo (died 430). Theodore was trained in the theological school of Antioch. His concern was to assert the reality of Jesus' humanity. He spoke of Jesus being one person (Greek: *prosopon*), having two natures (Greek: *physis*). The primary meaning of *prosopon* was 'face'. He used it to refer to Jesus as a subject who relates to God and to others. Where Theodore spoke of '*prosopon*', Augustine used the Latin '*persona*': a word used for the mask through which the sound of the actor's voice could be heard. The mask enabled the audience to recognise the character being portrayed on stage by the actor.

'*physis*' is a word from science, classifying a being by what it does. Jesus did things that showed he was man. He did things that showed that God was working in and through him. In Jesus two different ways of being and acting are united while remaining distinct. Where Theodore used the Greek '*physis*', Augustine used the Latin '*natura*', with the same connotations. Theodore was concerned that in Alexandrian theology Jesus 'being man' was in danger of being lost in his 'being God'.

The Council of Ephesus 431

The Third Ecumenical Council was held in Ephesus in 431, just after the death of Theodore in the East and Augustine in the West. It was a very messy Council. Cyril of Alexandria opened the Council before John of Antioch or the Roman legates had arrived. Nestorius, bishop of Constantinople, refused to attend. He was condemned as a heretic by the Alexandrians and the bishops of Asia (both groups were anti-Constantinople). When John of Antioch arrived he held a counter-synod, which deposed Cyril. The Roman legates sided with Cyril and excommunicated John. The Pope intervened and demanded that Cyril and John be reconciled.

The Council issued a statement declaring Mary *Theotokos* (the 'Mother of God'). Their aim was to insist on the divinity of Jesus. The expression they chose, however, lacked any of the subtlety of the theological terms that had been hammered out in previous councils. Here, and in the other statements that issued from the Council, they failed to open up a theological way towards solving the existing tensions, and so failed to achieve peace.

In 448 Eutyches, a 90-year old monk, attached himself to the 'one *physis*' formula proposed by Cyril of Alexandria, as his way of insisting that all that was human in Jesus was consumed by his Spirit. Jesus was acting as one conscious subject. Some understood Eutyches as denying the 'two *physis*' formula, thereby having Jesus human nature absorbed into his divine nature – in effect denying the reality of his humanity.

Theologians took sides without clearly defining what they intended by the word *physis*. In fact they meant different things. Cyril meant something close to 'being' or even 'subject'. He was wanting to preserve Jesus as one being, one subject. Cyril's opponents used *physis* to speak of a way of acting, distinguishing between the divine action of the Word and the human action of Jesus.

Each side accused the other of heresy. Eutyches appealed to Pope Leo. In 449 a synod was held at Ephesus led by Dioscorus of Alexandria. It supported the rebellious clergy, including Eutyches, against Flavian, Patriarch of Constantinople. The synod was supported by the Emperor Theodosius. However, Pope Leo rejected this Council, which was dubbed the 'Latrocinium' ('Council of Robbers'). In 450 the Emperor died.

The Council of Chalcedon 451

The following year (451) the Fourth Ecumenical Council took place at Chalcedon. It marks the conclusion of our brief study. Pope Leo had the following statement read out at the synod:

'The same who, remaining in the form of God, was made man in the form of a servant. For each of the natures retains its proper character without defect; and, as the form of God does not take away the form of a servant, so the form of a servant does not impair the form of God ... For the selfsame who is truly God is truly man. And there is no illusion in this union, while the lowliness of man and the loftiness of God meet together. For as 'God' is not changed by the compassion exhibited, so 'man' is not consumed by the dignity bestowed. For each 'form' does the acts that belong to it in communion with the other: the Word performing what belongs to the Word, and the flesh carrying out what belongs to the flesh. The first shines out in miracles; the second succumbs to injuries.'

The Council makes very sad reading. Little attempt was made to seek understanding. The above declaration from Pope Leo provided a way through as it gave clear expression to the Western Church's understanding of the reality of Jesus' humanity. The bishops finally agreed to the following statement (Catechism n.464, 467). Speaking of 'the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ', the Council asserts that he is

- 'perfect in divinity, perfect in humanity; true God and true man
- of rational soul and body
- of one being [*'homoousios'*] with the Father in divinity
- of one being [*'homoousios'*] with us in humanity
'being in all things as we are, without sin'(see Hebrews 4:15).
- begotten of the Father before all time as to his divinity
- begotten in recent times, for us and for our salvation, from the virgin Mary, mother of God, as to his humanity.'
- 'We confess one and the same Christ, the Son, the Lord, the only-begotten
- made known in two natures [*'physis'*]
without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.
- The differences of the natures is in no way removed by reason of the union
but rather the properties of each are preserved
- coming together in one 'person' [*'prosopon'*] and one 'subsistence' [*'hypostasis'*].

Note the ambiguity in the term *homoousios*. In relation to the Father it refers to one and the same being (there is only one God). In relation to us it refers to one and the same species (there is more than one human being). Note also the accommodation of differences in preferred terminology, in the acceptance of '*prosopon*' and '*hypostasis*' as equivalent terms for that which is special to Jesus.

Jesus' divine 'nature'

The Council declares that the divine Word is in two natures 'without confusion'. There is not a mixture of divinity and humanity. Jesus' humanity is like ours (but without sin). So he has human consciousness, decisions, feelings, emotions, thoughts, words, and actions. The Council insists also that Jesus' two natures are 'without change'. Jesus is not inhuman, not ahuman, not subhuman, not superhuman. His humanity is not more than, less than, other than, our humanity. It is not changed by his being divine. His divinity is the divinity of the Father. It is not changed by his being human. The Council goes on to state that Jesus' two natures are 'without division'. Both ways of acting, divine and human, coexist in one subject and in one object of understanding. Finally, the two natures are 'without separation'. He who acts in a human way is he who acts in a divine way.

Divine 'nature'

The following question emerges: 'Granted that there is only one God, what does it mean to speak of a divine nature'? 'Nature' is a scientific classification concerned with behaviour. The higher we ascend the scale of being, the less something is defined by its nature. The more free a being is, the more its behaviour is defined by the choices it makes, and not by its 'nature'. To say of two people 'they are human beings' tells us something quite basic about them, but there is a lot about being this person or that person that it leaves unexplained. God is total freedom. So God's 'nature' means what God chooses to do. We can know God's nature only by knowing what God has chosen to do in relation to us.

Christians believe that, because of Jesus' complete openness to grace, God has expressed God's Self in a perfect human way in Jesus, who is the Way to God, and the answer to our question: 'What is God's nature? What does God choose to do? How does God choose to relate to us?' We come to know God by knowing Jesus. We enter into communion with God by entering into communion with Jesus. We know Jesus' divine nature by knowing his human nature. We know the divine aims, decisions, choices, teachings of God by knowing the human aims, decisions, choices and teachings of Jesus. Hence the critical importance of not confusing Jesus' natures. To do so would mean losing Jesus' humanity. This would mean losing the Way, the Truth and the Life. God would not be revealed. It is also a protection against Jesus being absorbed into false ideas of God.

Our personal religious experience is confirmed and given meaning by our believing what has been handed down through tradition, especially through the sacred scriptures. We are taught to believe that Jesus is fully human, like us. We are taught that Jesus is truly the Son of God, drawing his life completely from God. From the beginning Christians affirmed this in their words and in their lives.

What did the Council of Chalcedon achieve?

The pressure to state clearly what they meant by what they said, and the false judgments that were condemned as undermining faith, created a dynamic that kept clarifying the question, and uncovering ambiguities and implicit contradictions, as well as defining terms with accepted meanings to give expression to the wonderful mystery of Jesus in his relationship to God and to us. The main achievement of the Council was to underline what is obvious from the Newer Testament: the reality of Jesus' humanity.

Dogma

The word 'dogma' is used for a teaching that is authoritatively set down. Dogmas developed as people attempted to express the symbolic heart-statements of the Newer Testament in terms that answered the questions people were asking in their searching for clarity of meaning by defining error and pointing the way towards the truth. The statements contained in the Creeds are examples of dogmas. Incidentally the word 'heresy' comes from the Greek word meaning a 'selection'. Most heresies contain some truth. The problem is that the truth they contain is taken out of context, and is asserted in such a way as to leave out or deny other truths in the process. The Church aims to hold all aspects of the truth, often in tension. The truth that they contemplated in Jesus required a recognition of heresy. It required also an expanding and deepening of the meaning of words such as 'person', 'nature' 'substance', 'being'. If we are going to be helped by their answers, it is essential to grasp the questions that they were attempting to answer. It is essential also to grasp the fact that in attempting to find clear, finely chiselled philosophical words, they were attempting to speak of the same Jesus that we find in the simpler more homely words of the Newer Testament.

The Councils of the early Church cannot be thought of as the last word on Jesus. They belong to their time and necessarily suffer from the limitations of the horizons of thought within which they were conceived. We are to reject what they rejected, but we must not forget that they were attempting to answer their questions with the limited tools at their disposal. They never claimed that theirs were the only questions, so they never claimed that theirs were the only answers. What we are looking for are the false understandings that they rejected, and the consistent thrust of the faith-convictions that directed them in their quest for clarity. We have to find for our time the words that will express the insights that they expressed in their way, and we have to find new insights to answer the new questions that we are asking, always faithful to the Tradition.

In his Book '*Arians in the Fourth Century*' (I.5.2), John Henry Newman speaks of

'timid and narrow-minded people who were unwilling to receive the truth in that depth and fullness in which scripture reveals it, and who thought that orthodoxy consisted in being at all times careful to comprehend in one phrase or formula the whole of what is believed on any article of faith.'

Elsewhere Newman says:

'May we never speak on subjects like this without awe; may we never dispute without charity; may we never inquire without a careful endeavour, with God's aid, to sanctify our knowledge, and to impress it on our hearts, as well as to store it in our understanding' (*Parochial and Plain Sermons* VI on the Feast of the Holy Trinity).

His words apply to the whole of Church teaching.

Pope John XXIII

I conclude this summary treatment by repeating the words of Pope John XXIII in the opening address of the Second Vatican Council:

‘Christians and Catholics of apostolic spirit all the world over expect a leap forward in doctrinal penetration and the formation of consciences in ever greater fidelity to authentic teaching. But this authentic teaching has to be studied and expounded in the light of the research methods and the literary formulations of modern thought. For the substance of the ancient deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another. And it is to this latter that careful and where necessary patient consideration must be given, everything being measured according to the requirements of a teaching authority that is predominantly pastoral in character.’

Nowhere is such penetration needed more than in our understanding of the relationship of Jesus to God, and so of the relationship of God to us.