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Finding the Form of God in Philippians 2: Gregory of Nyssa and the Development of Pro-Nicene Exegesis

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Abstract — I argue that Gregory of Nyssa reshaped the Logos-Sarx theological motif through his use of a new theological exegesis of the Christ Hymn in Phil 2. In his argument against Apollinarius, Gregory draws on an earlier Pro-Nicene exegetical tradition, one that was originally formulated in the 350s against the anti-Nicene Homoians by theologians such as Hilary of Poitiers. This exegetical tradition centered on Phil 2:6–7, and it was intended to demonstrate the unity of the Son's divinity and humanity against Homoian attempts to use the distinction between divinity and humanity in the Son to subordinate the Son to the Father. In this reading, Gregory's problem with Apollinarius is that Apollinarius's theology violates something central to the Pro-Nicene tradition that Gregory had inherited, namely, the need to preserve the union of the full divinity and humanity in the Son. Without this, Gregory believes, key aspects of Pro-Nicene faith and practice, especially its account of divinization, fall apart. By using Phil 2 to construct a new theological motif, Gregory can articulate a Christology that has deep exegetical roots and overcomes the limitations of the Logos-Sarx model.

Key Words — Gregory of Nyssa, Logos, Sarx, Hilary of Poitiers, Athanasius of Alexandria, Christology, Philippians, Christ Hymn

The standard histories of the development of patristic Christology almost unvaryingly portray it as a conflict between an Alexandrian Logos-Sarx Christology and an Antiochean Logos-Anthropos version. The pervasiveness of this narrative is difficult to overestimate. One often gets the impression that accounts of the Incarnation can be evaluated by how well they "got" or did not get the final solution put forward at Chalcedon.[1] It is

1. A case in point is Aloys Grillmeier's evaluation of Cappadocian Christology, which he faults for using "mixture" language that was later repudiated and for not sufficiently defining the relationship between substance and hypostasis—two categories that have more to

not my purpose here necessarily to challenge the standard narrative of the fifth-century controversies. I do want to argue, however, that a fundamental shift took place in Pro-Nicene accounts of the Incarnation during the mid-fourth century, and that the story of this shift can only be told by examining the development of Pro-Nicene exegesis.

To test my thesis, I will examine Gregory of Nyssa's interpretation of Phil 2:6–7 in the context of fourth-century attempts to describe the Incarnation and work out the relationship between the Father and the Son. I will argue that Gregory recasts the Logos-Sarx motif by using a new theological reading of Phil 2:5–11 to address a new polemical challenge, that posed by Apollinarius of Laodicea.[2] Gregory's problem with Apollinarius is that Apollinarius is using an inadequate exegetical framework to explain the Incarnation precisely because Apollinarius relies too heavily on the Logos-Sarx motif. As a result, Apollinarius's theology violates something central to Gregory's fundamental theological concerns, namely, the need to preserve the union of the full divinity and humanity in the Son. Without a compelling account of this union, which would include an authoritative exegetical foundation, Gregory believes that key aspects of Pro-Nicene faith and practice, especially its account of divinization, simply are not sustainable.

Because Apollinarius's Logos-Sarx theology had a rich exegetical tradition, Gregory needed a new exegetical framework to recast it, and he found one in early Pro-Nicene attempts to offer a theological exegesis of the Christ Hymn of Phil 2. In his argument against Apollinarius, Gregory draws on a specific Pro-Nicene exegetical tradition that was originally formulated in the 350s against the anti-Nicene Homoians by theologians such as Hilary of Poitiers. This exegetical tradition centered on Phil 2:6–7, and it was intended to demonstrate the unity of the Son's divinity and humanity against Homoian attempts to use the distinction between divinity and humanity in the Son to subordinate the Son to the Father. This new exegesis of Philippians proved useful to Gregory because it gave him a new theological motif—*forma servi, forma dei* (Phil 2:6–7)—that had a deep exe-

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do with the fifth century than the fourth (*Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol 1 *From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)* [2nd ed , Atlanta John Knox, 1975], 369)

2 For recent studies of Apollinarius's thought that help situate Apollinarius within the development of Pro-Nicene theology, see Kelley McCarthy Spoerl, "Apollinarius and the Response to Early Arian Christology," *Studia patristica* 26 (1993) 421–27, idem, "Apollinarian Christology and the Anti-Marcellan Tradition," *JTS* 45 (1994) 545–68, idem, "The Liturgical Argument in Apollinarius Help and Hindrance on the Way to Orthodoxy," *HTR* 91 (1998) 127–52, idem, "Apollinarius on the Holy Spirit," *Vigiliae Christianae* 57 (2003) 571–92 Also important is Rowan A Greer, "The Man from Heaven Paul's Last Adam and Apollinarius' Christ," in *Paul and the Legacies of Paul* (ed William S Babcock, Dallas Southern Methodist University Press, 1990), 165–82

getical foundation of its own but that also allowed for a more compelling theological account of the Incarnation.

A central component of my argument is that by tracing the interpretation of Phil 2, we can identify three stages in fourth-century Christology. The first is the Arian controversy, and the representative figure is Athanasius of Alexandria. Athanasius belongs to a stage in the controversy in which questions about the unity of Son's divinity and humanity took a backseat to questions about the preexistence of the Son and his superiority over creation. Athanasius's exegesis reflects these concerns, and it contrasts with exegetical strategies in the later two stages. The second stage focuses on Hilary of Poitiers. In the case of Hilary, we find a new polemical context, along with a new exegetical and conceptual strategy, in which the unity of the divinity and humanity is now central and depends on a new exegesis of Phil 2:6–7. This strategy carries over into the third stage where Gregory of Nyssa uses the basic framework of the traditional exegesis to make a similar polemic point against Eunomius and Apollinarius, but he also applies that strategy against someone who was ostensibly Pro-Nicene. In this third stage, therefore, a proper exegesis of Phil 2 was necessary not only to refute the Homoians and Eunomians but also to preserve the growing Pro-Nicene sense that the union of the Son's divinity and humanity is what makes our divinization possible.

GREGORY'S USE OF PHILIPPIANS 2 AGAINST APOLLINARIUS

Gregory's extended anti-Apollinarian exegesis of Phil 2:6–7 occurs in the middle of the *Antirrheticus,* composed against Apollinarius around the year 385. Brian Daley highlights this passage to illustrate the narrative structure of Gregory's soteriology.[3] My interest here, however, is on Gregory's exegesis of the Philippians text, particularly on how he uses that text to portray the unity of the Son's divinity and humanity. Gregory brings up Phil 2 in the midst of a discussion of one of Apollinarius's more unusual teachings, that the Son was united to the flesh prior to the Incarnation. Gregory seems mostly puzzled that Apollinarius would bother to defend such a position, and he rather sensibly asks how human nature can exist before the creation of human nature.[4] This leads him, however, to reflect

3. Brian Daley, "'Heavenly Man' and 'Eternal Christ': Apollinarius and Gregory of Nyssa on the Personal Identity of the Savior," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10 (2002): 480.

4. It is not at all clear, in fact, that Apollinarius did teach that the Son was united to the flesh prior to the Incarnation. At the very least, Apollinarius appears to have been aware of the charge, and in several of his surviving fragments we find him attempting to address this very point. In fragment 145, for example, Apollinarius asserts that we can call the Word *sarx* because of the incarnation (διὰ τὴν ἕνωσιν), and in fragment 148 he claims that the body was not changed from something made into something uncreated (εἰ τὸ ἄκτιστον εἶναι). In fragment 32, Apollinarius argues that Christ is the "man of God" because of the spirit. This is intriguing,

on the character of the Son's unity with the Father and, more to the point, the Son's unity with his own humanity, and it is here that he turns to Phil 2. When the Philippians text says that Christ was in the form of God, it means that all things in the Father, such as eternity, quantity, immateriality, and incorporeality, belong to the Son. And if they are equal, then there can be no discrepancy between the two in that the Son has an eternal corporeal nature while the Father is incorporeal. Furthermore, that the Son had to empty himself to take on the form of a human strongly suggests that he was not human to begin with; his nature did not have this likeness with the human nature from the beginning.[5]

This rather straightforward conclusion leads Gregory to wonder exactly what happens when the divinity assumes the humanity: What does it mean for the divine Son to humble himself? When the Son united himself to the *forma servi*, Gregory argues, this allowed him to share in the sufferings that are proper to the human condition. This is not to say that the divinity itself suffered, but the human united to that divinity did suffer, and as a result, Christ can overcome the death that is the result of our disobedience. This, in turn, means that humanity as a whole now has access to the resurrection that is anticipated by the union of divine and human natures in Christ. Through that union, humanity is transformed, and it assumes the lofty characteristics of divinity. For Gregory, the upshot of all this is that those who adore the exalted Christ can now strive for union with the divinity.[6]

As Brian Daley has suggested, Gregory is especially interested here in describing the putting on of the *forma servi* as an "event."[7] Gregory is more than willing to exploit the "form" language for its ontological implications, i.e., to show that the Son was, in an ontological sense, fully divine and fully human. But what really seems to capture his attention is the idea that there is something in the self-emptying movement from the form of God to the form of a servant that allows the Son to *unite* with our human nature. Gre-

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in part, because it may show where the charge came from For Pro-Nicenes like Gregory, the "man of God" language would be suspicious when applied to the preincarnate Word, no matter how much Apollinarius would try to explain it Once the charge was in place, Apollinarius's other responses would seem to be non-denial denials Fragment 148, for example, could be taken to mean that the body was uncreated to begin with Apollinarius certainly flirts with provocative language, which may explain why someone like Gregory would deliberately misunderstand him My thanks to Kelley Spoerl of Saint Anselm College for alerting to me to this point and directing me to the relevant fragments For the Apollinarian fragments, see Hans Lietzmann, *Apollinarius von Laeodicea und seine Schule* (Tubingen Mohr, 1904)

5 *Antirrheticus*, in Werner Jaeger, ed , *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* (GNO) 3 1 (Leiden Brill, 1958) 159 I will hereafter cite passages in the *Antirrheticus* by GNO volume and page number

6 *Antirrheticus*, GNO 3 1, 161–62

7 Daley, "Heavenly Man," 480

gory goes to great lengths to emphasize the union of the humanity and divinity in Christ, even though this unity is, at best, only implied by the Philippians text. When Gregory returns to Apollinarius, however, the reason for his emphasis on unity becomes apparent. According to Gregory, Apollinarius says, "What could be clearer? Opposites cannot be united, which is to say, the perfect God with perfect man."[8] Gregory links this quote to another that, for Gregory, is even more revealing: "A human's body is a contemptible form."[9] These statements are problematic, Gregory believes, because they deny the reality of the incarnated Christ's human mind/soul. In other contexts, Apollinarius argues that because the human mind so is sullied by its contact with the human body, God cannot assume it.[10] But from Gregory's perspective, to say it this way yields a false account of the Incarnation and an inadequate account of human salvation, and not just because it would exclude the human mind from the experience of salvation. According to Gregory, therefore, we must take the assumption of the *forma servi* to include the entire human, including the mind.[11] Failing to do so turns the entire account of the Incarnation into a fantasy: all of the miracles, the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection did not occur unless Christ was fully human. So when Apollinarius goes on to say that the exaltation of Christ belongs only to the divinity, Gregory finds the most sacrilegious statement of all. It is the humanity that is exalted, Gregory concludes, without which we cannot understand our own resurrection.[12]

For Gregory, then, Apollinarius's theology has the unfortunate effect of denying the reality of the Son's full humanity. Apollinarius may well have agreed with this assessment.[13] The problem, for Gregory, is that to deny the full humanity of the Son has significant implications for what Christians can say about the process of salvation. Unless there was a full humanity, there could not have been a true union between the divinity and the humanity. Apollinarius may think he has preserved that union, but in Apollinarius's case we end up with something less than full humanity. But without that union, Gregory cannot see how it is possible to talk about genuine improvement in our human nature through its association with the divinity. Philippians 2:6–7 plays an important role in making this case, because the *morphe* language allows us to talk about the reality of the form as the full nature, and it also allows us to talk about the presence—union—of those natures in the person of the Christ. In this light, Phil 2 makes two

8. *Antirrheticus*, GNO 3.1, 162.

9. *Antirrheticus*, GNO 3.1, 163.

10. See the *Epistle to Diocasesaraenses* 2.5–7; Lietzmann, *Apollinarius*, 256.

11. Ibid.

12. *Antirrheticus*, GNO 3.1, 166.

13. See, e.g., fragment 45; Leitzmann, *Apollinarius*, 214. My thanks again to Kelley Spoerl for suggesting that I consult this text.

important contributions to Gregory's theology. First, it gives him terminology for describing the presence of two full natures in Christ. Second, the narrative of the Christ Hymn is also useful, because it helps make clear the unity of the person of Christ. In the Hymn, we see the divine Christ who then assumes the human nature. There is only one actor in this drama, which means that the one who became human is that same one who existed in the form of God.

Philippians 2 in Pro-Nicene Polemics: Hilary and Athanasius

Hilary of Poitiers on the Unity of the Divinity and Humanity

The background for Gregory's turn to Phil 2 lies in the previous generation of Pro-Nicene exegesis. To illustrate the character of that exegesis, I turn now to Hilary of Poitiers. Sometime in the late 350s Hilary of Poitiers made a major shift in his account of the Incarnation. Hilary had been trained in classical Latin Christology, which meant that Hilary utilized the "Logos-Sarx" (*sermo-caro*) model of his great predecessor Tertullian.[14] What this background meant for Hilary, among other things, was that he had no ready language for describing the unity of the Son's divinity and humanity in the Incarnation. In his early period, in fact, Hilary seems quite comfortable denying that any such unity exists.[15] Beginning in 356, however, his engagement in polemical debate with the Homoians caused Hilary to rethink this entire approach. The Homoians also denied the unity of the Son's humanity with his divine nature, and Hilary came to believe that Pro-Nicene Christology had to defend that unity if it was also going to defend the full equality of the Son to the Father. Accordingly, in the Christological section of his anti-Homoian masterpiece, *De Trinitate*, Hilary sets forth an account of unity of the Son's divinity to his humanity by using the *forma* language in Phil 2:6.[16] Because the Son was in the *forma* of God and the *forma* of a human at the same time, Hilary argues, we can recognize not only that the Son was fully God and fully human but that that

14 The influence of Tertullian and other early Latins on Hilary's preexilic theology is well attested See especially the magisterial work of Jean Doignon, *Hilaire de Poitiers avant l'exile* (Paris Études Augustiniennes, 1971) For a treatment of Hilary's early Christology that highlights his emphasis on the Latin version of Logos-Sarx, see Daniel H Williams, "Defining Orthodoxy in Hilary of Poitiers' *Commentarium in Matthaeum*," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9 (2001) 151–71, Paul C Burns, *The Christology in Hilary of Poitiers'* Commentary on Matthew (Roma Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1981)

15 Burns makes this point effectively (*Christology*, 92)

16 For a more detailed treatment of these points, including the shift in Hilary's later Christology, see Mark Weedman, *The Trinitarian Theology of Hilary of Poitiers* (Leiden Brill, 2007), ch 6 I have adapted my treatment of Hilary from this chapter

full humanity and full divinity of the Son are, by virtue of that fullness, inseparable. If we do not encounter Jesus as both God and human, then we encounter someone who is less than God.

The question, then, is why Hilary felt it necessary to alter what had been a longstanding tradition of Latin Christianity. The answer is that Hilary has to address a much different polemical context, and his old thought was inadequate to meet the new challenge. By the time he wrote *De Trinitate*, Hilary was fully enmeshed in the controversy between Pro-Nicenes and the early Homoian represented by the "Blasphemy" (Hilary's word) of Sirmium 357. Much of this debate concerned the classically trinitarian question about the nature of the Son's divinity. But there is also evidence that Christological questions played an important role as well, with Pro-Nicenes arguing that the Homoians denied the reality of two natures in the Incarnated Son.

Hilary's contemporary, Phoebadius of Agen, for example, quotes a letter of a Homoian bishop named Potamius of Lisbon, who argues that, "God became capable of passion by the flesh, and the spirit of Christ coagulated through the blood of Mary and was reduced into one body."[17] Phoebadius believes this formulation distorts the Incarnation, because it does not allow Christ to be either divine or human:

> This is said lest someone believe that the one Christ is from Him who, it is agreed, is not capable of passion. You, therefore, have made some sort of third state from the Spirit of God and the flesh of a human being, because He is neither truly God if He has ceased to be the Word; for He was made flesh. Nor is he truly a human being because He was not specifically made flesh: for he was the Word. And thus, from each of the two substances, it is now neither. But I say it is the one Christ who has drawn the distinction against this poison and both of his own substances by the special character of his passion. . . .[18]

Of special note in our context is Phoebadius's insistence that the Homoians have distorted the true picture of the one Christ. They have, in a sense, overdetermined the character of the Son's unity by denying that either the "divinity" (*spiritus*) or humanity corresponds to divinity itself or humanity itself. The result is a weird hybrid substance that is "one" but that is neither human nor divine.

Hilary knows a Homoian Christological formulation that is different in form but similar in intent to the one Phoebadius reports. We have a *regula* of an early Homoian leader, Eudoxius of Constantinople, who claims that the Word "became flesh, not human, because he did not take a human

17. Phoebadius of Agen, *Contra Arrianos* 5.1; CCL 64, 27.
18. Phoebadius of Agen, *Contra Arrianos* 5.2–3; CCL 64, 27–28.

soul. . . ."[19] Hilary repeats this assertion in his *De Trinitate*. According to Hilary, the Homoians argue that the Word completely absorbed the soul and performed the soul's vivifying function.[20] By absorbing the human soul, the Homoians believed that the Word itself underwent both a change and a weakening, which results in a reduction in divinity. The value of this doctrine, as Hilary acknowledges, is that it preserves the Father from passion. It also, however, distorts key doctrines of the Christian faith:

> [The true faith] of the Church . . . knows the dispensation, but is ignorant of a division. It does not separate Christ Jesus so that Jesus Himself is not Christ, nor does it differentiate the Son of Man from the Son of God, lest, perhaps, the Son of God may not also be recognized as the Son of Man . . . in Him is the whole God the Word and in Him is the whole man Christ.[21]

As with Phoebadius, Hilary believes that Homoian Christology has the net result of "separating" the divinity from the humanity. Hilary recognizes that the Homoians are trying to do the opposite, to articulate the Incarnation in such a way as to preserve the unity of the Son. But by ultimately denying the reality of both the divinity and humanity, they end up with a Christ who is divided.

As this evidence suggests, Pro-Nicenes had to counter Homoian Christology by showing how the incarnated Son was "one" but also retained the status of full divinity and humanity. For Phoebadius the root problem here is that the Homoians reject substance language, and so they have no conceptual foundation for preserving the true humanity and divinity of the Incarnate Son. The solution, then, is simply to recover the Nicene doctrine of "one substance."[22] Hilary's thought agrees with this perspective, but he is not content merely to recover Nicaea. Hilary also believes that new language is necessary to articulate more fully the unity of the Son's divinity and humanity, and he makes his own attempt to find that language in *De Trinitate* 10 by turning to Phil 2:6–7.

This book, which Hilary wrote sometime around 360, has not won him many admirers. His attempt to explain how the divine Son could suffer by denying that the Son actually felt any pain has struck both his own contemporaries and modern theologians as a theology that treads danger-

19 The text of Euxdoxius's *Rule* is in August Hahn, *Bibliothek der Symbole und Glaubensregeln der Alten Kirche* (Breslau, 1897), 261–62 This line is cited in R P C Hanson, *Search for the Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh T & T Clark, 1989), 190

20 *De Trinitate* 10 51, CCL 62a, 505

21 *De Trinitate* 10 52, CCL 62a, 506, ET in Stephen McKenna, trans , *The Trinity* (Fathers of the Church 25, Washington, D C Catholic University Press, 1954), 439

22 See *Contra Arrianos* 6 1–8 7

ously close to Docetism.[23] It is certainly not my purpose to defend Hilary on this point, but I will suggest that the controversy over whether Hilary was a Docetist has obscured other arguments in the book that are at once more central to Hilary's own purposes and more indicative of the course of Pro-Nicene thought as a whole. Hilary has to accomplish three things in his Christology: he has to protect the Father from suffering, he has to preserve the divinity of the Son, and he has to do both of these in a way that allows for the human experience of glorification in the Son. The key to accomplishing each of these tasks is the *forma servi, forma dei* language of Phil 2:6–7.

> But that He who was in the *forma dei* should receive the *forma servi* is bringing contradictories together, so that there is just as much truth in Him being in the *forma dei* as there is in Him receiving the *forma servi*. . . . We profess that he is one and the same, not by losing anything that belongs to God, but by the assumption of a human nature . . . Therefore, since Jesus Christ was born, suffered, died and was buried, He also rose again. In these different mysteries He cannot be divided from Himself in such a manner that He is not Christ.[24]

In other words, Hilary has taken the dual use of "*forma*" in Phil 2 as proof of the constitutive unity of the divinity and humanity in Christ. His logic here has two parts. First, because the incarnated Christ is both *forma servi* and *forma dei*, he is fully (truly) God and fully (truly) human. The Son is as "true" (*verus*) in the form of God as that of the servant. Hilary takes this exegesis a step further, however, when he argues that, if the Son is truly God and truly human, then we must understand that the *contraria* of divinity and humanity in the person of Jesus are "merged" (*conparatur*). Hilary's language is far from precise, but his point seems to be that if we attempt to separate the divinity from the humanity in any way—e.g., by using the sufferings of Christ to deny the divinity—then Christ ceases to be himself.[25]

A number of Pro-Nicene authors will also argue that we must assign some characteristics of the Son (such as suffering) to his humanity and

23 Hanson is especially harsh (*Search*, 501), but for an alternate opinion, see Carl Beckwith, "Suffering without Pain The Scandal of Hilary of Poitiers' Christology," in *In the Shadow of the Incarnation Essays in Honor of Brian E Daley* (ed Peter Martens, South Bend, IN University of Notre Dame Press, forthcoming), Mark Weedman, "Martyrdom and Docetism in Hilary's 'De Trinitate,'" *Augustinian Studies* 30 (1999) 21–41

24 *De Trinitate* 10 22, CCL 62a, 476, McKenna, *Trinity*, 414

25 The *forma servi* language also resolves for Hilary the question of whether Christ has a soul To assume the *forma servi* is to receive from Mary everything that is proper to what it means to be human, including a soul See *De Trinitate* 10 15, also see 10 22 Note that Hilary does not *equate* Jesus' soul with normal human souls in the sense that he thinks Jesus' soul was conceived without sin This means, among other things, that Jesus' soul is not "weak," which means that it does not transmit pain from his body

others to his divinity.[26] What seems especially unusual about Hilary's exegesis, however, is his use of the Phil 2 language to describe the entire dynamic of the Incarnation, i.e., how the Son can be human and divine at the same time. The *forma* language allows Hilary to argue that the Incarnation involved only a change in *habitus*, not one of power (*virtus*) or nature (*natura*). Although the Father and Son's natures remained united, the incarnated Son lost the unity with the Father's *forma*; he retains the Father's power but not his form.[27] Thus, Hilary does not use Phil 2 to keep the two natures distinct but to unify them and so demonstrate that the one who assumes the humanity is the one who was the form of God. If the Incarnation is a movement of *habitus*, or *forma*, we do not have to say that the Son was ever separated from the Father's nature. As G. Pelland notes in his Sources Chrétiennes edition of *De Trinitate,* Hilary uses *forma* as a condition that is "characteristic of being" and "determined by nature," but which can change without affecting that underlying nature.[28] Taking *forma* in this sense allows Hilary to argue that the "assumption" of the *forma servi* not only does not separate the Son from the Father but also unites the Son's divinity and humanity.[29] "But, as the assuming of the *forma servi* is nothing else than being born as a man, so being the *forma dei* is nothing else than being God. We profess that he is one and the same, not by losing anything that belongs to God, but by the assumption of a human nature."[30]

This exegesis allows Hilary to protect the Father and affirm the union of divinity and humanity in the Son. Hilary then turns to what all this means for human salvation. In his early writings, Hilary frequently asserts that our human bodies, when resurrected, will correspond to the glorified bodies of the angels. In his later writings, however, Hilary makes Christ's body the model for our postresurrected body, our resurrected bodies will conform to Christ's.[31] For this scheme to work, Christ's human body must have been fully human; otherwise, there is no basis from which Christ can draw us to himself. Christ's sinless body anticipates the nature of our bodies after the resurrection. Christ's body is the human body in its ideal state. So when Hilary describes how Christ can be fully human while retaining

26 See, among others, Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* 3 2 55, GNO 2, 70

27 *De Trinitate* 9 38, CCL 62a, 411

28 See G Pelland, ed , *La Trinite* (Sources Chretiennes 462, Paris Cerf, 1999), 41 n 3 "La 'forme' est la condition caracteristique d'un être, l'espression determinee d'une nature La 'forme' peut changer, le sujet restant le même Ainsi en est-il du Christ, qui est passe de la condition de serviteur avant sa resurrection (in forma servi) a la condition glorieuse (forma Dei) qu'il a acquise en ressucitant "

29 For "assumption" in Hilary, see Jean Doignon, "'Adsumo' et 'adsumptio' comme expressions du mystere de l'Incarnation chez Hilaire de Poitiers," *Archivum latinitatis medii aevi* 23 (1953) 123–35

30 *De Trinitate* 10 22, CCL 62A, 476

31 For an examination of this development, see Burns, *Christology,* 28

his divinity, as he does in Book 10, he has to do so in such a way as to protect the "glory" of the Son's human body. To be sure, Hilary does maintain that our bodies are distinct from the Son's in ways that may strike modern readers as problematic.[32] But he continually insists on both the full humanity of the Son and the union of that humanity with the full divinity.

For both Gregory and Hilary, therefore, the language of Philippians serves to describe the fundamental unity between the Son's divinity and humanity, just as both believe this unity, as supported by the exegesis of Phil 2, then serves to provide an account of the Christian identification with the incarnated Son. The similarity between Hilary and Gregory does not necessarily suggest a direct connection between Gregory and Hilary, though there is circumstantial evidence for such a case. Hilary came of age as a theologian in the East, and his mature Trinitarian theology has as much in common with eastern categories as it does with western.[33] Hilary was almost certainly influenced by Basil of Ancyra, and there is a strong possibility that Basil lies in Gregory's background as well, if only indirectly. I realize that this last point is somewhat controversial,[34] so for now I will only suggest that Gregory is working with an exegetical tradition similar to that established by Hilary, one that saw the *forma* language in Phil 2 as a way of describing the unity of Christ against opponents who denied that unity, and both of them use that tradition to explore the soteriological implications of that union.

Athanasius of Alexandria and the Eternity of the Word

The importance of Gregory and Hilary's approach to Phil 2 lies partly in the way it repudiates previous approaches to both Phil 2 and theological/exegetical accounts of the Incarnation. To highlight the newness of their approach, therefore, it might be helpful to examine another option for exegeting Phil 2 that would have been available to both Gregory and Hilary: Athanasius's interpretation of Phil 2 in light of the Prologue to John.

Athanasius's most complete exegesis of Phil 2 occurs at *Contra Arianos* 1. Unlike Hilary, who focuses on the *forma/morphe* language, for Athanasius the polemical pressure is on vv. 9 and 10, which are about the exaltation of the Son. The Arians use these verses to argue for the Son's inherent inferiority to the Father: that the Son could be exalted means that he existed in an inferior state prior to that exaltation. The only way that God could

32 This is Hanson's criticism (*Search*, 501)

33 See Weedman, *Trinitarian Theology*, ch 4

34 For an argument against the Homoiousians as a source for Cappadocian theology, see Johannes Zachhuber, "Basil and the Three-Hypostases-Tradition Reconsidering the Origins of Cappadocian Theology," *Zeitschrift fur Antikes Christentum* 5 (2001) 65–85

"give" the Son the "name that is above every name" is if the Son had an inherent "defect" or "affectation" in his *ousia*.[35] Athanasius can think of two responses to this exegesis. First, by drawing on the movement implied by "form of God" emptying himself to become the "form of a servant," Athanasius argues that the exaltation applies only to the Son's humanity. Because of this movement, Athanasius believes, we cannot say that the Son was promoted from a lower state, since, as the text states, the Son was already equal to God. Thus to suggest, as the Arians do, that the Son descended in order to receive something new—to be exalted—misses the point.[36] Instead, we must understand that the Son descended and took on the form of a servant for our sakes

> And the term in question, "highly exalted," does not signify that the essence of the Word was exalted, for he was ever and is equal to God [Phil 2 6], but the exaltation of the manhood Accordingly, this is not said before the Word became flesh [a reference to John 1 14], that it might be plain that humbled and exalted are spoken of his human nature [37]

By becoming human, the Son could die for our sakes 'in his flesh.' Therefore, the exaltation belongs to the Son's humanity, so that by his exaltation, all humanity might be exalted along with him.[38]

Athanasius's exegesis in *Contra Arianos* 1.37–45 is notable for the degree to which he uses John 1:1 to provide the *scopos* for Phil 2. He actually cites two passages for this purpose, Ps 71 and John 1:1. However, this is the only time Athanasius cites Ps 71, and he seems attracted to it here because it affirms that the "Name" that the Son received in the exaltation shared in the Son's preexistence: "His Name remains before the sun, and before the moon, from one generation to another."[39] Athanasius moves immediately from the Psalm to John 1:1, and this is that text that plays the most prominent role throughout this section of *Contra Arianos*. Athanasius uses John 1 to establish two aspects of the Incarnation. The first is the preexistence of the Word. To make his case that the exaltation refers only to the humanity of the Son, Athanasius has to establish that the exaltation was not necessary before the Incarnation. John 1 gives him the language to do just that, such as when he says that "[highly exalted] was not said before the Word became flesh that it might be plain that 'humbled' and 'exalted' are spoken of his human nature "[40] This quotation actually gives an indica-

35 *Contra Arianos* 1 45, in Martin Tetz, ed , *Athanasius Werke* (AW), 1 1 2 *Die dogmatischen Schriften* (Berlin de Gruyter, 1998), 154

36 *Contra Arianos* 1 40, AW 1 1 2, 150

37 *Contra Arianos* 1 41, AW 1 1 2, 150, NPNF 4, 330

38 *Contra Arianos* 1 41, AW 1 1 2, 151

39 *Contra Arianos* 1 41, AW 1 1 2, 150, NPNF 4, 330

tion of the second way Athanasius uses John 1 to exegete Phil 2, namely, to explain that the "humiliation" language in Philippians refers to the "Word becoming flesh." In fact, Athanasius will rarely mention "*morphe doulou*" without a reference to either the Word or "becoming flesh."[41]

We see a similar example of Athanasius's emphasis on John 1 over Phil 2 in *CA III*. 29. This passage is important as one of the clearest accounts of the "double scope of Scripture" in the Athanasian corpus. "Double scope" refers to the hermeneutical device by which Athanasius (and all Pro-Nicenes) attribute some sayings of Scripture to the humanity of the Son and some to his divinity. Hilary and other late Pro-Nicenes will use the *forma dei, forma servi* language of Phil 2 to support this method. Athanasius cites Phil 2:6–8 here as well, but only after he has quoted all of John 1:1–3. When he comes to illustrate the use of the method, the Johannine language takes over.

> But now, since the Word of God, by whom all things came to be, endured to become also Son of Man, and humbled Himself, taking a servant's form, therefore to the Jews the Cross of Christ is a scandal, but to us Christ is "God's Power" and "God's Wisdom," for "the Word," as John says, "became flesh," it being the custom of Scripture to call man by the name of 'flesh '[42]

Athanasius then goes on to discuss several examples in Scripture that emphasize the flesh of Christ, and he asserts that all of these examples are proper to the flesh of Christ, while the Word is at once present and untouched. Athanasius then concludes this section by returning explicitly to John 1. The Arians, he asserts, err by failing to recognize this "double scope " Were they ever to learn the true meaning of "the Word became flesh," however, and so acknowledge the scope of Scripture, then they would return to the true faith.[43]

Even had Athanasius not explicitly tied his exegesis of Philippians to John 1, we might have suspected that this is what he was doing if only because of his overwhelming preference for the language of "Word" to account for the Son's preexistent divinity and the phrase "becoming flesh" to describe the Incarnation [44] Throughout his writing, Athanasius uses this

40 Ibid

41 For just one example, see *Contra Arianos* 1 43 "the savior humbled himself in taking our 'body of humiliation,' and took a servant's form, putting on that flesh which was enslaved to sin And he indeed has gained nothing from us for his own promotion, for the Word of God is without want" (NPNF 4, 331)

42 *Contra Arianos* 3 30, PG 26, 383, NPNF 4, 410

43 *Contra Arianos* 3 35, PG 26, 297

44 See Wolfgang A Bienert, "Zur Logos-Christologie des Athanasius von Alexandrien in *Contra Gentes* und *De Incarnatione*," *Studia patristica* 21 (1989) 402–19 Bienert notes that in *Contra Gentes* and *De Incarnatione*, Athanasius's "Logos Christology" was not, as some scholars

Christological language primarily for its soteriological implications, and this soteriology may explain why he continually returns to his exegesis of John 1 even while exegeting texts such as Phil 2. In the midst of his section on Phil 2 in *Contra Arianos*, for example, Athanasius manages to include a defense of deification:

> Therefore, if, even before the world was made, the Son had that glory, and was Lord of glory and the Highest, and descended from heaven, and is ever to be worshipped, it follows that He had not promotion from His descent, but rather Himself promoted the things which needed promotion; and if He descended to effect their promotion, therefore He did not receive in reward the name of the Son and God, but rather He Himself has made us sons of the Father, and deified men by becoming Himself man.[45]

The utility of John 1 for articulating this soteriology lies both in its emphasis on the Son's preexistence and on the Word's act of becoming flesh. Preexistence is necessary in order for the Word to be other than a creature and so capable of "deifying" creatures. "Becoming flesh" is necessary because it is the flesh that Athanasius believes is deified. Whatever position one takes on the question of what Athanasius means by *sarx*—whether it refers to the whole human, body and soul, or just the body—this is the concept he prefers for explaining deification.[46]

Thus Athanasius uses John 1:1 to establish the preexistence of the Son and to provide him with the language of deification, even when interpret-

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have suggested, fundamentally grounded in exegesis of John. Athanasius never quotes, e.g., John 1 14 in either of those works (404–5) Given the importance of exegesis in *Contra Arianos*, this suggests that Athanasius's appreciation of how to defend and understand this "Logos-Christology" changed as he engaged in the Arian controversy. This insight helps sharpen our appreciation of the importance of exegesis in Athanasius's anti-Arian works, especially *Contra Arianos*. For further discussion of this point, see Charles Kannengeiser, 'La Bible dans les controverses ariennes en Occident," in *Le monde latin antique et la Bible* (ed. Jacques Fontaine and Charles Pietri; Paris Beauchesne, 1985), 543–64

45. *Contra Arianos* 1.38, AW 1.1.2, 148; NPNF 4, 329.

46. For a review of the scholarly literature on the presence of a human soul in Athanasius's Christology, see Nathan K K. Ng, "The Soul of Christ in Athanasius. A Review of Modern Discussion," *Coptic Church Review* 22 (2001): 23–31. Although some of this scholarship has been useful for providing a clearer picture of Athanasius's Christology, much of it seems to me to be beside the point because it fails to acknowledge the exegetical character of Athanasius's thought, especially in *Contra Arianos*. In that work, the issue for Athanasius is always to counter-exegete Arian interpretation of Scripture, and his key doctrines, including deification, arise out of that exegesis. The presence or absence of a human soul in Christ played no role in those questions, and his anachronistic failure to meet the demands of later controversies should not reflect on his own thought one way or the other For a brief treatment of Athanasius's Christology that attempts to break free of the classical categories, see Khaled Anatolios, "The Body as Instrument A Reevaluation of Athanasius' Logos-Sarx Christology," *Coptic Church Review* 18 (1997). 78–84.

ing Phil 2. What makes this move somewhat surprising is that, by the standards of later Pro-Nicene exegesis, such as Hilary's, an explanation of both the Son's preexistence and the plan of salvation was available in the Philippians text itself through the *forma* language. The differences between these two theologians attest to different polemical and exegetical contexts. Hilary, as we have seen, belongs to the 350s and the ongoing struggle against Homoian theology, while Athanasius belongs to the 340s and the older struggle over the theologies of Arius. Athanasius ultimately has little to say about the union of the Word to the flesh. In his polemical context, the question was over the status of the Word: was it eternal and separate from the Father? The status of the flesh, and the relationship between the flesh and the Word was of secondary importance, and his exegesis reflects this perspective.

GREGORY AND THE LIMITATIONS OF LOGOS-SARX CHRISTOLOGY

Two Exegetical Traditions in Contra Eunomium

In Hilary and Athanasius, then, we find two exegetical traditions for Phil 2, and these two traditions yield different accounts of the Incarnation. For Athanasius, Phil 2 functions as virtual synonym for John 1. He makes no effort to exploit the ontological possibilities contained in the text's "form" language. Instead, he takes "form of a servant" to indicate the act of the Word "becoming flesh." Athanasius's exegetical strategy both yields and reflects his theological and polemical context. Above all, Athanasius wants to defend the eternal generation of Son, and he has adequate language for that task in John 1:1. By defending the eternal generation, Athanasius can not only answer the Arians, he can also sustain his own doctrine of the Incarnation, in which the eternal Word vivifies and transforms human flesh. By contrast, a different polemical agenda led Hilary to use Phil 2 differently. For Hilary, the *forma* language is crucial for providing an account of the Incarnation that preserves both natures while also answering his opponents' objections that Christ must be "one." Like Athanasius, Hilary's exegesis has an eschatological dimension, in which the human nature of the Son anticipates the nature of our resurrected bodies.

Of these two options, Gregory belongs in the later tradition. The extent to which this is so becomes clear in an extended argument that begins in *Contra Eunomium* 3.3.2. Gregory offers a long quotation from Eunomius in which Eunomius challenges Basil's exegesis of Phil 2:6–7. In the quotation, Eunomius has accused Gregory's brother, Basil of Caesarea, of teaching two Christs and two Lords. According to Eunomius, Basil cannot reconcile his exegesis of Phil 2:6 with a number of other controversial texts,

especially Peter's line from Acts 2:36 ("God made him Lord and Christ") but also John 1:1 and Basil's claim that the "man who was seen" (an apparent reference to John 1:14) was the Word. Eunomius's logic is as follows: If Basil wants to take John 1:14 as referring to the Word, then he must also take "form of a servant" in Phil 2:7 as referring to the Son in his eternal nature. Basil claims that the one who was "made" (Acts 2:36) was Word who became flesh (John 1:14) and the one who emptied himself; Peter is referring to the Incarnation. The problem, however, according to Eunomius, is that this means that "the man who was seen" emptied himself into the form of a servant, which means that a man emptied himself to become a man. This is a logical absurdity, says Eunomius, because we are left with two Christs, the one who existed before the Incarnation as the Word and the one who was "made" Christ in the Incarnation.[47]

The emphasis on John 1 seems to be from Eunomius more than Basil, though the language itself is present in Basil's text, which may underscore Eunomius's perception of the weakness of traditional Pro-Nicene interpretation of that passage.[48] At the very least, Eunomius believes he can use John 1:1, 14 effectively against Pro-Nicene exegesis. Eunomius's criticism of Basil's exegesis relies heavily on his own understanding of the status of the Word as distinct from the Father. It is Basil's failure to acknowledge that distinction that leads to the logical inconsistencies in his exegesis. It would be better, Eunomius concludes, to acknowledge that the Word who was in the beginning is Lord, and that this "Lord" is identical with the one who took on the form of a human. When we do this, we can then make better sense of Peter's words, because to say that God "made" him Lord is now entirely consistent with our conception of the nature and status of the Word.[49]

Despite the fact that Basil's initial argument was built around Phil 2, Eunomius makes little effort to counter-exegete that passage, preferring instead to concentrate on John 1. Whether Eunomius uses John 1 this way because he believes that it is the weak point in Pro-Nicene polemics or because he wants to use it to support a Logos-Sarx Christology or both, he is working with the older, Athanasian/Eusebian tradition that uses John 1 to interpret Phil 2. It is suggestive, therefore, that Gregory reverses this procedure in his response to Eunomius. Earlier in *Contra Eunomium*, Gregory had affirmed the basic Pro-Nicene position that the phrase "form of God" means that the Son shares the Father's essence, just as the phrase "form of a servant" means that the Son takes on a human essence. "Form" does not

47 Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* 3 3 19, GNO 2, 114

48 See Basil of Ceasarea, *Contra Eunomium* 2 3, SC 305, 16–18 Basil does at least allude to John 1 here, but his focus is on technical aspects of Eunomius's linguistic theory, a fact that Eunomius apparently ignores when he responds in the *Apologia Apologiae*

49 Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* 3 2 24–25, GNO 2, 116

refer to shape, but to essence.[50] Gregory then draws on this principle when he replies to Eunomius's "two Lords" critique in *Contra Eunomium* 3.3. After repeating Eunomius's citation of John 1, Gregory asserts that there is no conflict between what he and Basil believe and what the Gospel teaches.

> [Eunomius] knows, surely, that the Word is identical with the Word, He who appeared in the flesh with Him who was with God. But the flesh is not identical with the Godhead, so that of necessity one set of attributes befits God the Word, and a different set of attributes befits the "form of a servant."[51]

From Gregory's perspective, the error behind Eunomius's charge of "two Lords" is that he does not acknowledge the reality of—and nature of—the Son's humanity. The language of Phil 2 is indispensable in this context to establish the reality of that humanity and so distinguish the Word as he is in himself from his humanity. In making this argument, Gregory has reversed Eunomius's approach. Philippians 2 now comes first, so that Gregory uses it to interpret John 1, not the other way around.

Logos-Sarx Is Not Enough

We are now in a position to ask why Pro-Nicenes like Gregory felt it necessary to recast the exegetical foundation of the Pro-Nicene Christology. For a first look at the answer, it is helpful to return to Gregory's polemic against Apollinarius. Gregory begins the *Antirrheticus* by critiquing the inscription on Apollinarius's treatise, which reads, "The Proof of the Divine Incarnation according to the Likeness of Man." Gregory is troubled by what he perceives to be the implications of that title. In Gregory's mind, it implies that Apollinarius believes that the Incarnation produces someone who is neither totally God nor totally human. If, as Apollinarius claims, the Word took on "divine flesh," then this means that the divinity either had to be mutable, or that it appeared twice, once as the Word and once as the mediator between the divinity and the humanity.[52] Gregory has deliberately misrepresented Apollinarius here, but he understands his opponent, and Gregory's argument demonstrates something crucial about what Apollinarius believes and what Gregory thinks is the problem with it. When Apollinarius says that the Word replaces the human mind in Christ while leaving in place the human soul and body, Gregory believes that this denies the full reality of both the divinity and the humanity in the incarnated Word.

50. *Contra Eunomium* 3.2.147; GNO 2, 100.
51. *Contra Eunomium* 3.3.62–63; GNO 2, 130; NPNF 4, 180.
52. *Antirrheticus,* GNO 3.1, 133.

What Gregory's response to Apollinarius reveals is that this is also a problem with Logos-Sarx Christology itself.[53] After diagnosing the problems with Apollinarius's Christology at the beginning of the *Antirrheticus*, Gregory quotes three texts that all refer to either the Word or God becoming flesh, including John 1:14.[54] These are foundational incarnation texts, but Gregory uses them, somewhat surprisingly, as divinity texts, i.e., to demonstrate that it was God who became flesh. Gregory does mention the significance of the full humanity of Christ, body and soul here, but it is not until the Phil 2 section in the *Antirrheticus* that Gregory fully develops what the humanity entails and what it means for us.[55] Texts such as John 1:14 are insufficient for Gregory's purposes because Apollinarius can use them equally effectively. To counter the early Arian attempts to distinguish the humanity of Christ from his divinity, Apollinarius uses Logos-Sarx to unite them. Gregory wants us to understand that the humanity and divinity are united in the Incarnation too, but he also wants to preserve the incarnate Son's divinity and humanity in their fullness. To accomplish this, he needs another Christological model, and he finds one in the burgeoning Pro-Nicene exegetical tradition surrounding Phil 2:6–7.

This is not to suggest that either Gregory or Pro-Nicene thought in general ever abandons Logos-Sarx Christology.[56] Nor does this evidence exhaust the full range of issues at stake either in Gregory's debate with Apollinarius or Apollinarius's thought. It is particularly important to note that Gregory formulates his Christology within the context of a broader

53 For a similar claim, see Daley, "Heavenly Man," 475 Daley notes that Apollinarius's doctrine of the "enfleshed logos" was much older than Apollinarius and took a number of different, and competing, forms in the fourth century My insight is that the Eunomians and Homoians exploited the Logos-Sarx element of this doctrine as a weakness in Pro-Nicene thought, which forced Pro-Nicenes like Gregory to recast Logos-Sarx in light of their interpretation of Phil 2 This is the exegetical tradition that Gregory brings to bear on his debate with Apollinarius

54 *Antirrheticus,* GNO 3 1, 133 The other texts are Ps 84 10 and 1 Tim 3 16

55 The one exception to this assertion is in the *Antirrheticus*, GNO 3 1, 140–41 Here Gregory cites 1 Tim 3 16 again along with Rom 7 23 and uses them to argue that the Son had a human soul Unlike his work in his section on Phil 2, however, Gregory does not explore the soteriological implications of the Son's human body

56 See Ayres, *Nicaea*, 303–8 Following the insight of the great nineteenth-century scholar Theodore de Régnon, Ayres argues that Pro-Nicenes transformed—but did not abandon—Logos theology, first by turning it into a "discussion of the Word's eternal procession on the model of the production of the 'inner word'" (304) Ayres extends De Régnon's thesis by arguing that Pro-Nicenes, of which Gregory is chief example, "treat the Word present in Christ as the ultimate agent in the process of redemption" (305) Ayres then offers a nuanced reading of Gregory that shows how for Gregory the union of the Word to the Father is what makes the ultimate union of humans to the divine—divinization—possible As I have argued in this essay, the transformation of Logos theology also included reading it in light of Phil 2, especially when discussing the Incarnation

attempt to find more precision in describing the Incarnation.[57] Nevertheless, the story of Gregory's theological exegesis of Phil 2 sheds light on how and why the early church appropriated certain texts as being of central importance for formulating their overarching theological perspectives. In this case, the Pro-Nicenes came to recognize that the Logos-Sarx metaphor was at once too reductive and liable to misuse. Because Logos-Sarx was itself the product of theological exegesis and actually had a long exegetical tradition to support it, Gregory needed a new exegetical strategy himself—thus he turns to Phil 2. It is worth noting that Gregory does not seem to think it is necessary, as did Hilary, either explicitly or tacitly to reject Logos-Sarx. But in light of Apollinarius, he is clear that Pro-Nicenes have to use great care when they apply that concept to the Incarnation.

What we have, then, is a process by which exegetes used Scripture theologically to overturn a prevailing but inadequate theological motif, which then allowed for a new reading of Scripture. Part of the value in attending to Gregory's exegesis of Phil 2 is to show how early theologians used theological exegesis to "crack nuts," that is, to overcome hermeneutical paradigms and theological models that prevented full engagement with the sacred text and, ultimately, with the full scope of religious experience.

57. For a thorough examination of Gregory's Christological vocabulary, see Jean-René Bouchet, "Le vocabulaire de l'union et du rapport des natures chez saint Grégoire de Nysse," *Revue Thomiste* 68 (1968): 533–82.