

# Christology

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CATHOLIC STUDIES  
ACADEMY



# Christology

## Syllabus & Objectives

This course is designed to advance the students' understanding of the theological problems surrounding the Person and place of Jesus Christ in theology. Students will be expected to engage in theological exploration of these problems surrounding the human and historical reality of Jesus of Nazareth in relation to the claims the Church makes surrounding his divinity, his place in salvation, and his significance for the final outcome of God's act of creation. As we explore these questions through an examination of many of the significant figures and events of the history of the Church, students will gain a deeper appreciation of the difficulties of the Christological problem, and the reasons that the Church says what she does, about Christ, and rejects as heresy what she does.

Students who complete this course will be equipped to:

- Identify the major lines of expectation in the Old Testament and how those expectations are tied together and fulfilled in the New Testament portrait of Jesus of Nazareth;
- Identify and define major Christological heresies, explaining why they are heresies;
- Relate the Jesus of history with the Jesus of faith in a coherent and orthodox way, according to the mind of the Catholic Church;
- Name the major Christological Councils of the Church in the Patristic Period, and explain what Christological issues were at stake in them;
- Identify the major creedal statements associated with the Councils of Nicaea I, Constantinople I, Ephesus, and Chalcedon, and what particular elements each added to our understanding and articulation of the dogma of Christ.

# Christology

## Lectures

The following lectures will be provided in this course:

- Introduction to Christology: What is Christology, and what is at stake in it for orthodox Christianity?
- Messianism in the Old Testament
- The New Testament Synthesis: Weaving the threads of expectation, reimagining the Messiah
- The New Testament Synthesis: Law and Grace: Christ as the Righteous One—the Man of the Torah
- The New Testament Synthesis: Christ as Logos, New Adam, Alpha and Omega, Eschatos Adam: John and Paul
- From the Apostolic Fathers to the cusp of the Arian controversy: the paradox of the God-Man unity
- Arius and Arianism
- The First Council of Nicaea
- Apollinaris of Laodicea vs. Theodore of Mopsuestia: The First Council of Constantinople
- Antioch vs. Alexandria: Nestorius of Constantinople, Cyril of Alexandria, Eutyches the Archimandrite, and the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon.
- Keeping Christology in harmony with Eschatology and Soteriology: avoiding the tendency to divide them (recapitulation: reintegration of creation/humanity, return of creation to Creator, Theosis)
- Keeping the balance: the different dimensions of the Incarnation and the tendency to emphasize one at the expense of others

# Introduction to Christology

Is it possible to have a Jewish Christology or is Christology only a Christian concern?

What does the term “Christ” or “Messiah” mean?

In the Old Testament, we can locate numerous prophetic expectations that are not identical to specifically messianic expectations. What happens, in the New Testament, to the concept of “Messiah” or “Christ” in relation to these other expectations?

What is the difference between the way in which the term “Emmanuel” (God-with-us) is understood in the Old Testament vs. the New Testament?

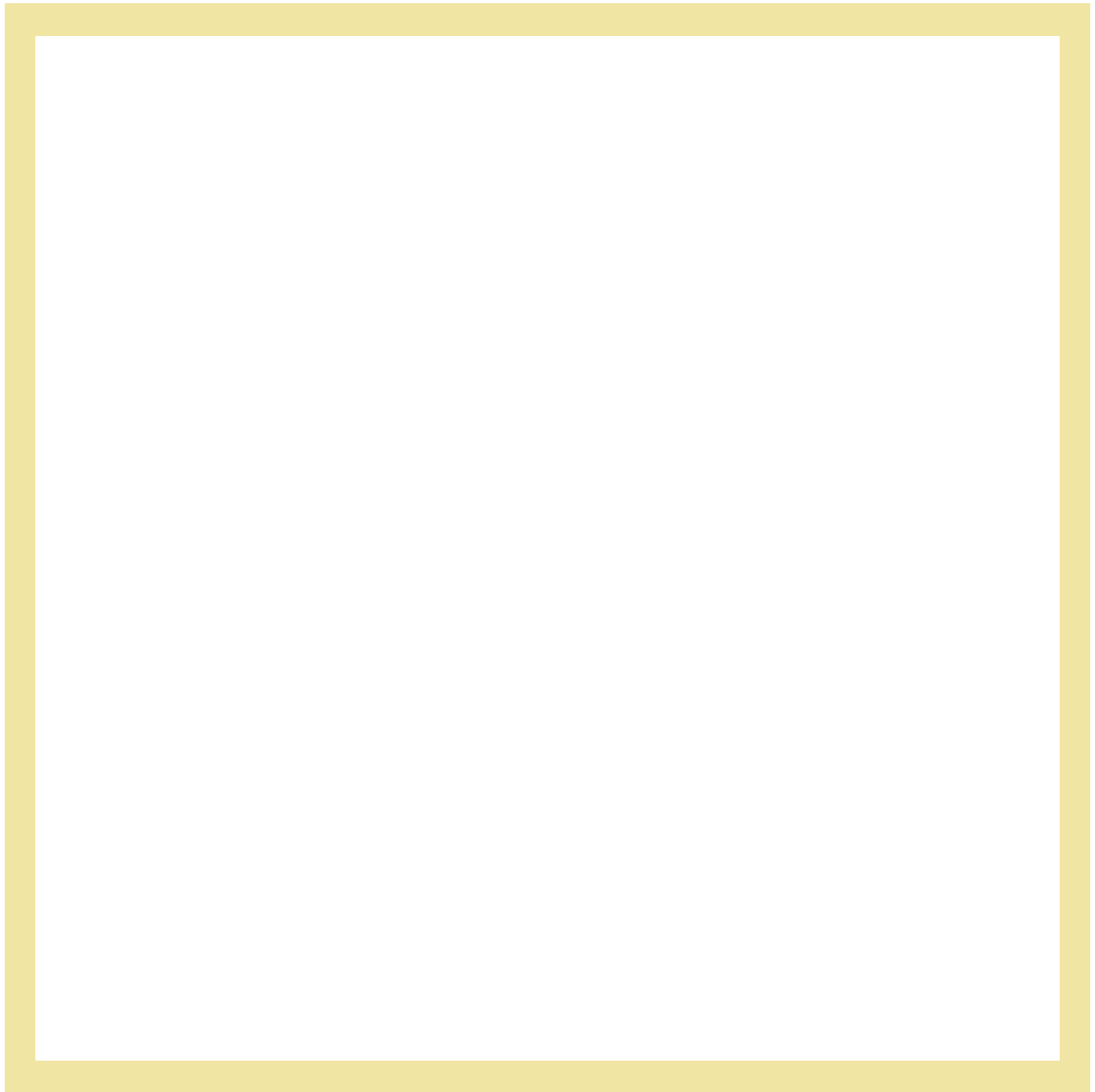
How is Christology bound-up with other major theological subdisciplines, like Trinitarian theology, soteriology, eschatology, ecclesiology, and sacramental theology?

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# Introduction to Christology

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# Messianism in the Old Testament

Suggested readings: Raymond E. Brown, S.S., *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), 155–161.

In the Old Testament, is the term “Messiah” necessarily reserved for one, definitive figure? To whom does the term “Messiah” refer in the 10th century B.C. in the Old Testament writings?

To whom does the term “Messiah” refer from around the 8th century B.C. in the Old Testament? Is this necessarily one person, or is it possible that it referred to a class of persons?

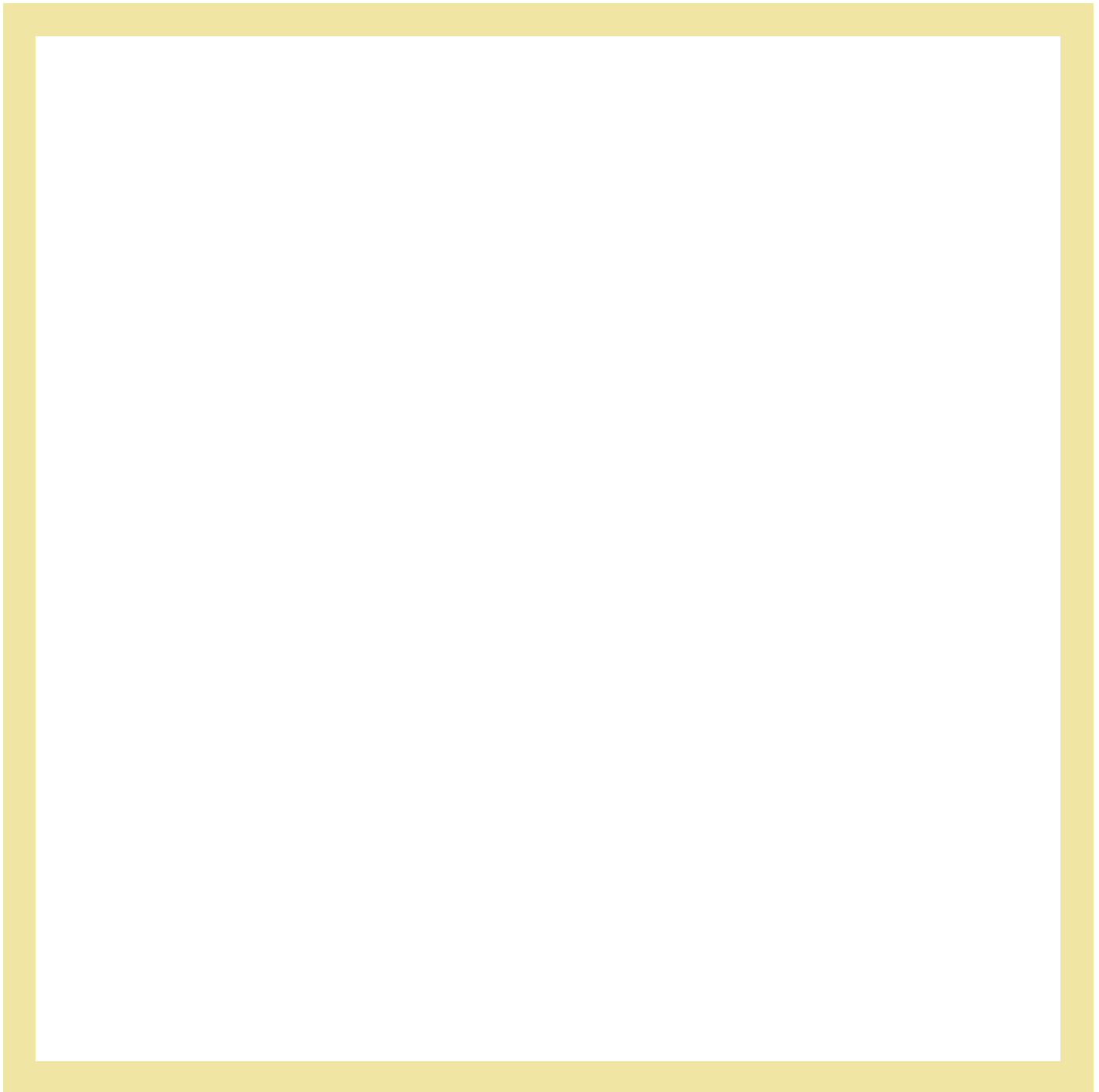
According to Old Testament expectations, is “Messiah” necessarily the cause of God’s presence among his people or is “Messiah” a sign of that presence?

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# Messianism in the Old Testament

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# The New Testament Synthesis, Part I

Suggested readings: Raymond E. Brown, S.S., *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), 71–100; Matthew 1:1–2:12.

What is the meaning of the “New David” or “Son of David”? This is the most obvious and direct Messianic attribution of Jesus in the New Testament. How does it relate to the idea of Jesus as “Son of God” in the original sense of that expression?

How does the Genealogy in Matthew’s Gospel address the idea of Jesus as the “New David?” What significance is this title given in Matthew’s gospel? Is it purely political or has it taken on a fully historical or even cosmological significance?

How does this title move beyond the idea of a king for Israel and come to be bound up with the King of the Universe?

The concept “Son of God” comes to be associated in Christianity with the idea of the Incarnation. Distinguish between the classifications, “high Christology” and “low Christology.” What evidence can we find in the New Testament of a high Christology?

The concept of Davidic kingship is associated with the concepts of “Son of Man” and “Suffering Servant” in the New Testament as well. How do these associations affect the concept of “Messiah”?

What does it mean to say that Jesus is “Judge” in the New Testament portrait of Jesus?



# The New Testament Synthesis, Part I

Suggested readings: Raymond E. Brown, S.S., *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), 71–100; Matthew 1:1–2:12.

What does it mean to say that Jesus is High Priest and Victim?

What is the meaning of the figure of the “Son of Man” in the Old Testament? Where do we see this term used explicitly in the Old Testament? How was this term used in common language in the time of Christ? How does it relate to the idea of the Perfect High Priest? How does the New Testament portrait of Jesus of Nazareth fulfill these expectations?

Who is the “Suffering Servant”? How is this concept related to, and also distinct from, that of the “Son of Man”? How does the New Testament portrait of Jesus of Nazareth fulfill this expectation?

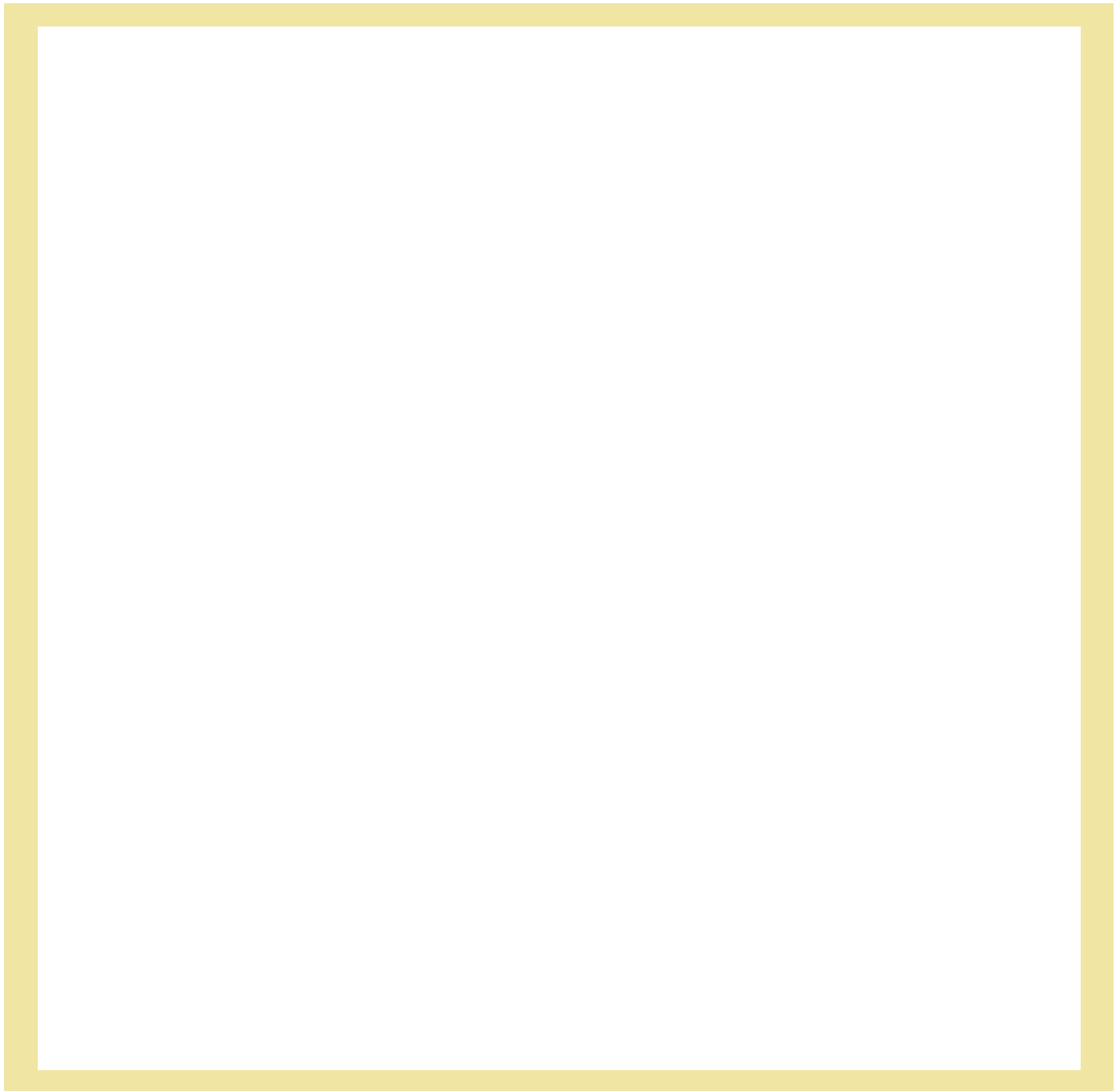
Consider other Old Testament figures who became typological expectations: Abel, Jonah, Joshua, Melchizedek? What did figures like these represent to the Hebrew People, and how does the New Testament portrait of Jesus of Nazareth in the New Testament address these expectations? Can you think of other figures that have typological significance associated with the New Testament portrait of Jesus of Nazareth? What is the Christological significance of the periscope in the Gospel of Matthew (16:13–19), where Peter makes his confession about Jesus?

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# The New Testament Synthesis, Part I

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# The New Testament Synthesis, Part 2

Suggested readings: Raymond E. Brown, S.S., *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), 105–141; Matthew 2:13–7:29; John 4:4–42.

What is the meaning of the expectation of the “New Moses” or “Prophet like Moses”? Can you think of passages in the New Testament that witness to Christ as this figure?

What is the meaning of the expectation of the “Righteous One” or “Man of the Torah”? How does the high Christology of the New Testament depict Jesus of Nazareth as the perfect fulfillment of this expectation?

How is does the idea of sacrifice in Hebrew thought lead to an ideal identity between priest and offering? How is this idea related to the New Testament portrait of Jesus of Nazareth and the theology of atonement presented there?

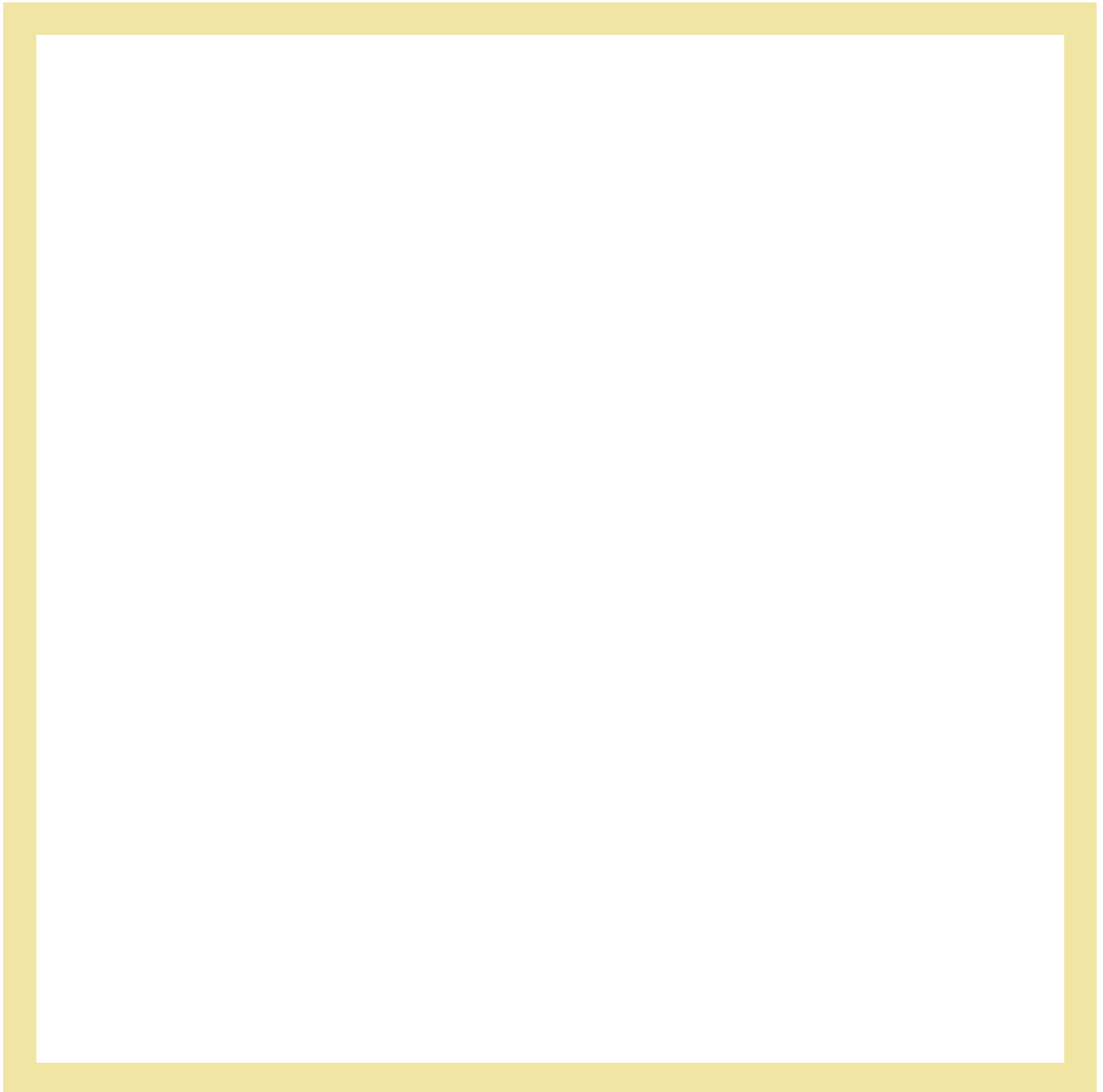
Consider how each of the concepts presented in this letter actually belong together as a whole in the thought of the New Testament authors.

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# The New Testament Synthesis, Part 2

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# High Christological Creedal Assertions in the Johannine and Pauline Texts

Suggested readings: John 1:1–14; 1 Corinthians 15:35–58; Ephesians 2:11–22; Philippians 2:5–11; Colossians 1:15–20; 4:1–16; Hebrews 1:1–4.

Logos Christology is most obvious in the Gospel of John, where it is explicitly presented in the Prologue's Creedal Hymn. What can you say about the Logos based on this text? Can you see the orthodox Faith there? Can you also see where there may be ambiguities that would lead to later controversies?

What does the concept of the New Adam entail in the Johannine and Pauline writings? How does it relate to a Eucharistic ecclesiology based upon the idea of true, bodily Communion?

What is meant by the idea of Christ as the Alpha and Omega? Consider both the divine aspect of Christ and the aspect of Christ as the New Adam.

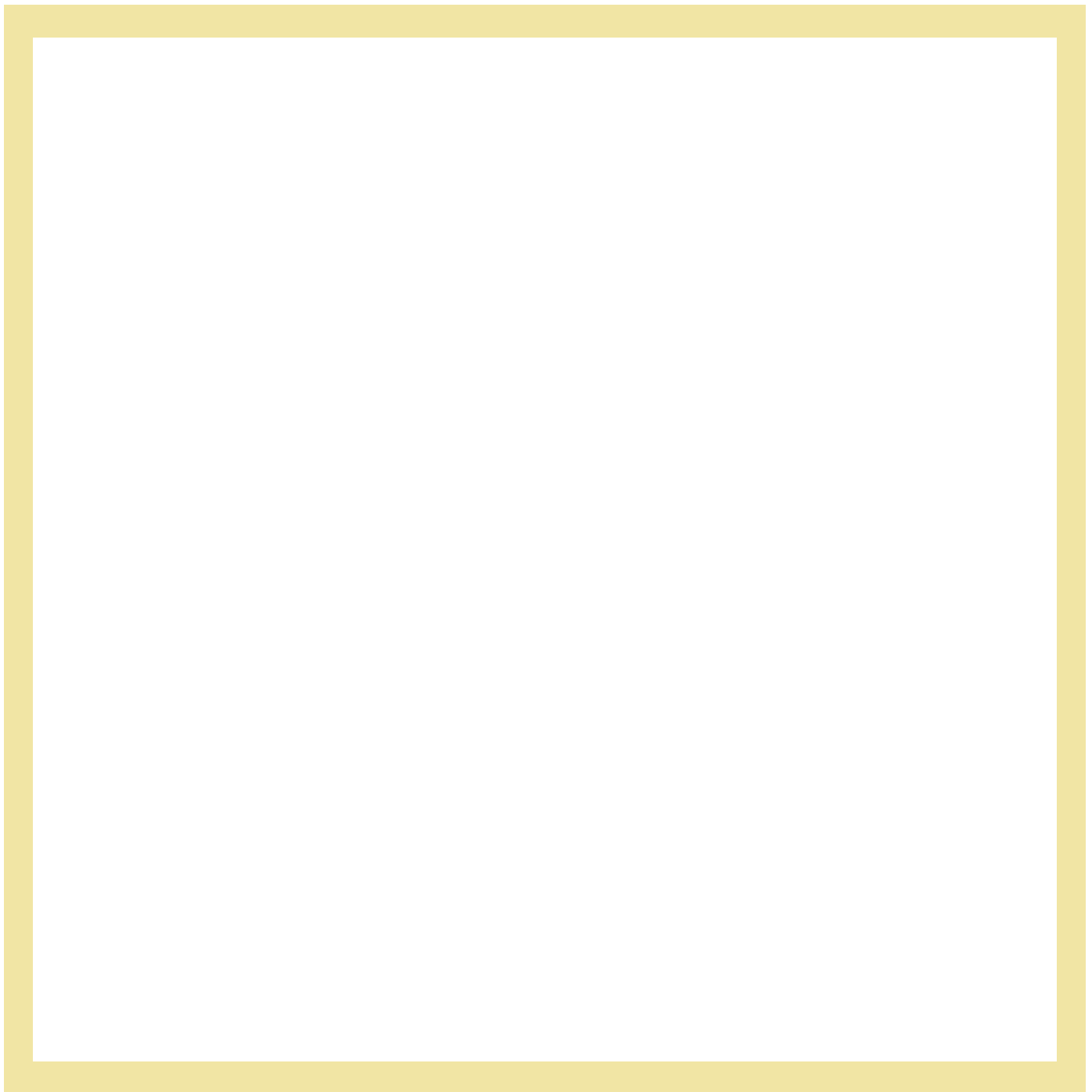
What does Paul mean when he speaks of Christ as *eschatos Adam* and *andra teleioun*? How does this understanding of Christ relate to the idea of Christ as New Adam and Alpha and Omega?

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# High Christological Creedal Assertions in the Johannine and Pauline Texts

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# From the Apostolic Fathers to the Cusp of the Arian Controversy

Suggested readings: Richard A. Norris, Jr., trans., ed., *The Christological Controversy, Sources of Early Christian Thought*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 1–17, 33–81.

What is Gnosticism and how does it relate to the Christological heresies we find addressed by the Fathers in the primitive Church?

Why does St. Ignatius of Antioch's view of Church and Eucharist as the means of salvation require a God-Man Christology?

St. Justin Martyr approaches Christianity through the Logos Christology of John. How does he describe the Logos and what is the theological shortcoming of this description?

Marcion of Sinope is an early Docetist. Why does Docetism reject the belief in a literal Incarnation of God? Do they deny that Jesus is God? What do they think he is?

# From the Apostolic Fathers to the Cusp of the Arian Controversy

Melito of Sardis argues typologically from the Scriptures that the images presented in the Old Testament are but shadows of greater and more perfect realities fulfilled in Christ. This approach is widely represented in the Fathers, but is also seen in the New Testament, especially in Hebrews. How does this line of reasoning point in the direction of a high Christology? Consider our earlier lectures in which we discussed Old Testament expectations, in particular, those of the New David, the New Moses, the Man of the Torah, and Emmanuel.

What is the basis of Irenaeus of Lyons's argument against the Marcionites? Do you recognize this theme from *Fundament Theology* and *Introduction to Moral Theology*?

How does Tertullian of Carthage advance the theological state of the question about Christ in his own day? How is his language a step in the right direction but not yet precise enough to constitute the formulation that will come later?

Origen of Alexandria continues in the line of Logos Christology as we saw in Justin Martyr. How does he attempt to explain the Incarnation? What are the shortcomings of his approach?

What is the major heresy Paul of Samosata attempts to address? Why does that heresy arise? What heresy does Paul resuscitate for his own part while attempting to confront it?

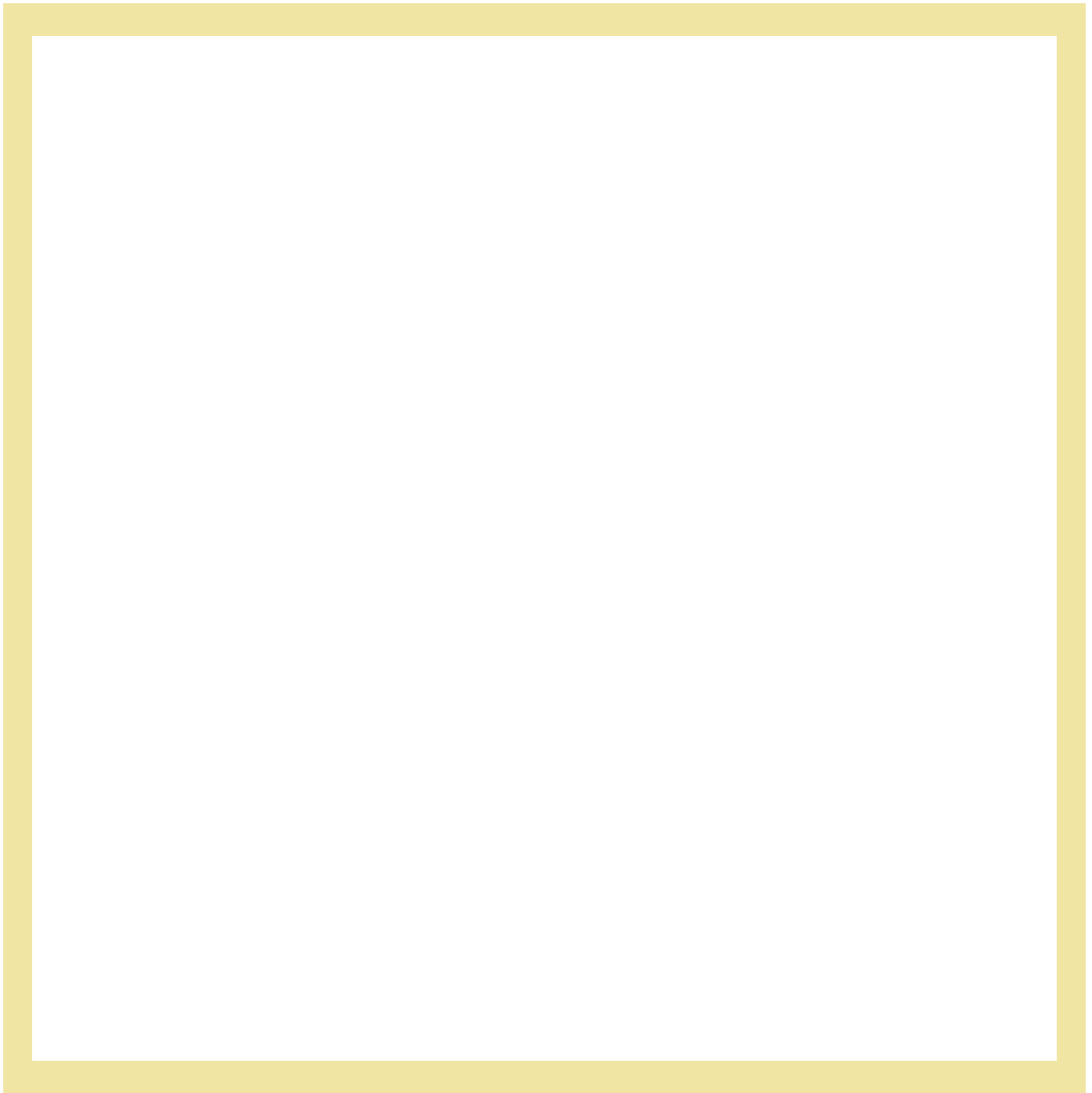


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# From the Apostolic Fathers to the Cusp of the Arian Controversy

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# The Arian Heresy

Suggested readings: Arius, Letter to Alexander of Alexandria. available online

Arius believes in an Incarnation, and in this way is not a Docetist. But his view of the Incarnation shares a common theme with Docetism in that there remains an underlying Gnostic prejudice regarding the way he thinks of matter in relation to God. Can you explain this?

What does Arius think the Logos is?

In Arius' own articulation of his Christological position, he quotes passages from Scripture which seem, on his reading, to support his view that the Logos is not God in the way that the Father is God. Can you see why he reads these passages the way he does?

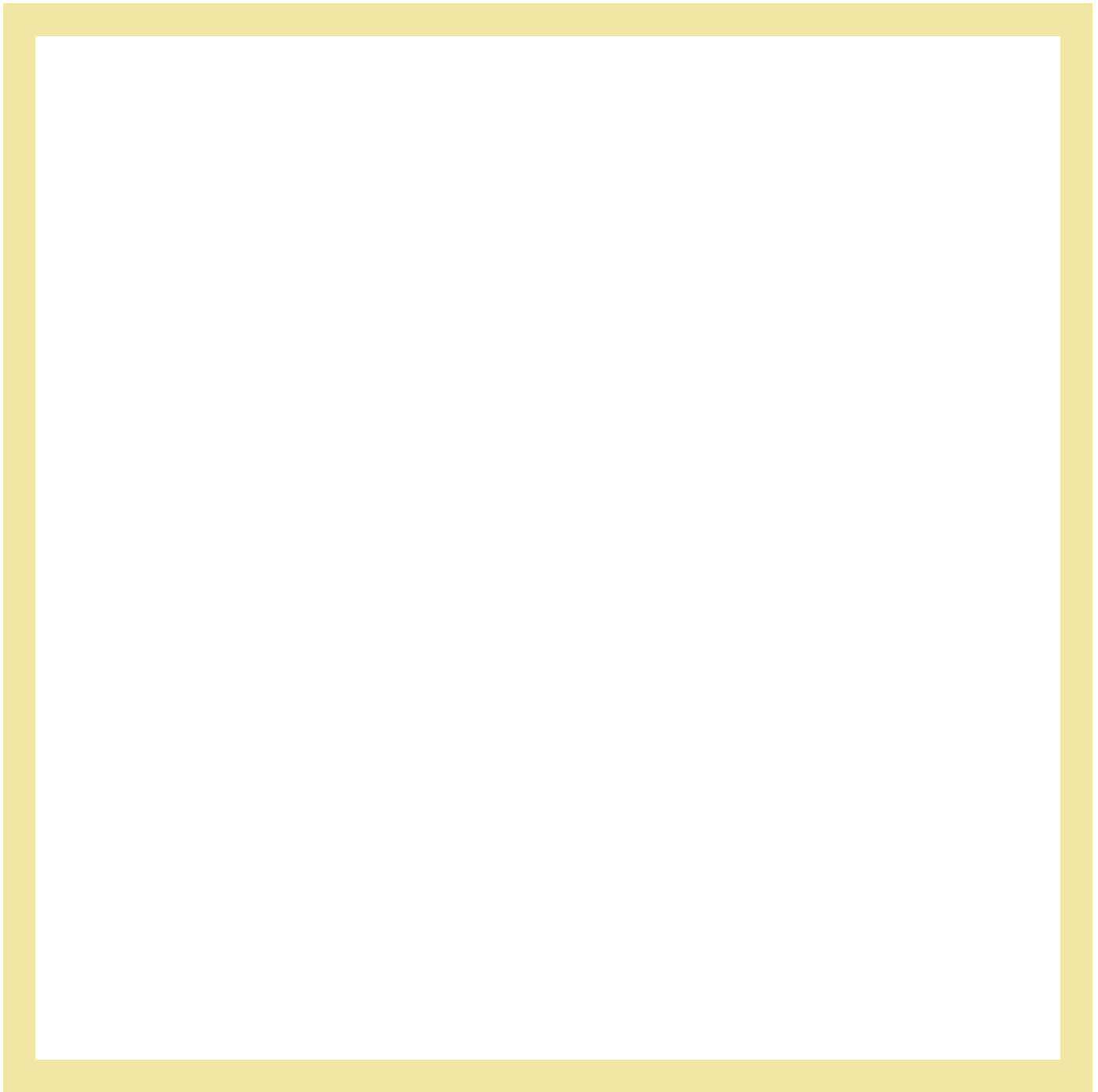
Can you think of any people in the broader Christian tradition today who hold views about the Logos similar to those held by Arius?

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# The Arian Heresy

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# The First Council of Nicaea (325)

Suggested readings: Richard A. Norris, Jr., trans., ed., *The Christological Controversy, Sources of Early Christian Thought*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 83–101; Creed of Nicaea.

Arius and the Eusebius had argued along Gnostic lines, that the Logos was a demiurge, not God in the way that the Father is God, because the material world, which the Logos fashions, could not bear the direct touch of God. What was the shortcoming of this view, for Athanasius? How did it fail both on its own terms and on the terms of Christianity's central eschatological affirmation?

At issue at the Council of Nicaea is the sense in which the Logos is divine. The Arian and Athanasian poles of this debate centered on an option between the words *homoiousion* and *homoousion*. The former was used by the Arians and the latter was used by Athanasius. Athanasius' view, and his language, prevailed at the Council. What was the difference in meaning between these two terms? Why was it so difficult to arrive at this definition? Consider the way in which metaphysical terminology in different linguistic contexts and within competing philosophical paradigms required the Church to arrive and standardize her own definitions in the course of this and subsequent debates.

# The First Council of Nicaea (325)

The homoousion position of Athanasius and Nicaea is really about the divinity of the Logos. What phrases are introduced into the Creed of Nicaea to ensure that it was understood that orthodox Christianity involved the belief that the Logos, who became Incarnate, is and always has been God in the same sense as the Father is God?

It is a very difficult thing to say that there is only one God, that the Father is not the Son, and that both the Father and the Son are God in the same sense. Does the term homoousion fully communicate this idea or does it leave room for a new controversy? How do the Fathers attempt to avoid a Sabellian interpretation in the Nicæan Creed?

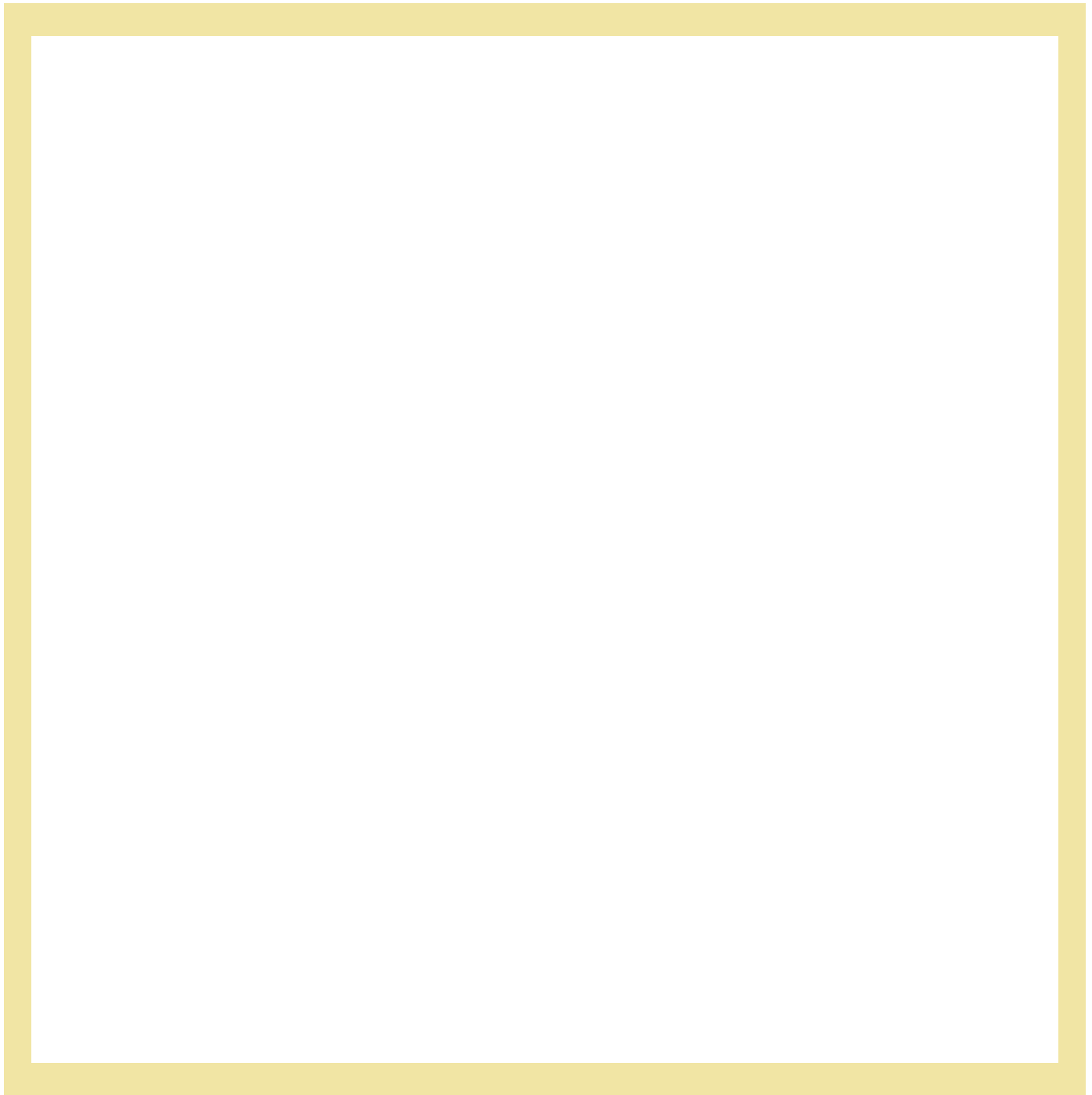
After the Council, many objected to the term homoousion because it was associated with Sabellianism and was not actually found in the Scriptures. Attempts to avoid the term, however, failed, from the perspective of orthodoxy, though, because they could not preclude an Arian interpretation. Such creedal formulations came to be called “Semi-Arian,” and their presence allowed actual Arians to argue that their own views were orthodox under those formulations. Thinking ahead, what did this problem do to help distinguish between the way we regard the definitions of ecumenical councils and other more regionalized synodal acts?

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# The First Council of Nicaea (325)

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# Apollinaris of Laodicea vs. Theodore of Mopsuestia and the First Council of Constantinople (381)

Suggested readings: Richard A. Norris, Jr., trans., ed., *The Christological Controversy, Sources of Early Christian Thought*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 21–26, 103–122; *The Creed of Constantinople (Nicaeano-Constantinopolitan Creed)* available online.

Following Nicaea, the debate shifted from the sense in which the Logos was divine to the sense in which the Logos was Incarnate. The discussion came to concern "Logos ensarchos." What does this phrase mean, and how is it a central issue in the controversies that move from this time through the Council of Chalcedon?

Apollinaris holds a view that can be described as "monopsychism" or "mononousism" depending how we define our Greek terms. What is the affirmation at the center of this view and why does he make it?

What does Apollinaris' view positively achieve in the wake of the Arian controversy and the faith of Nicaea?

Where does Apollinaris' position fail in the eyes of his critics? Consider the idea we discussed in Lesson 4 of the Righteous One and Man of the Torah. Does Apollinaris' position preserve this assertion about Jesus of Nazareth or undermine it?

Theodore says that Christ has two natures, but it is unclear whether, for him, the two natures coincide in a single individual person. Contrary to Apollinaris, Theodore insists that there really is a human spiritual soul in Christ, but that the union between humanity and divinity is effected through the communion of wills. How does Theodore's view result in exactly the problem Apollinaris sought to avoid? On Theodore's model, is there any real agency proceeding from Christ under his human nature? What important metaphysical question about the composition of Christ remains on Theodore's model?

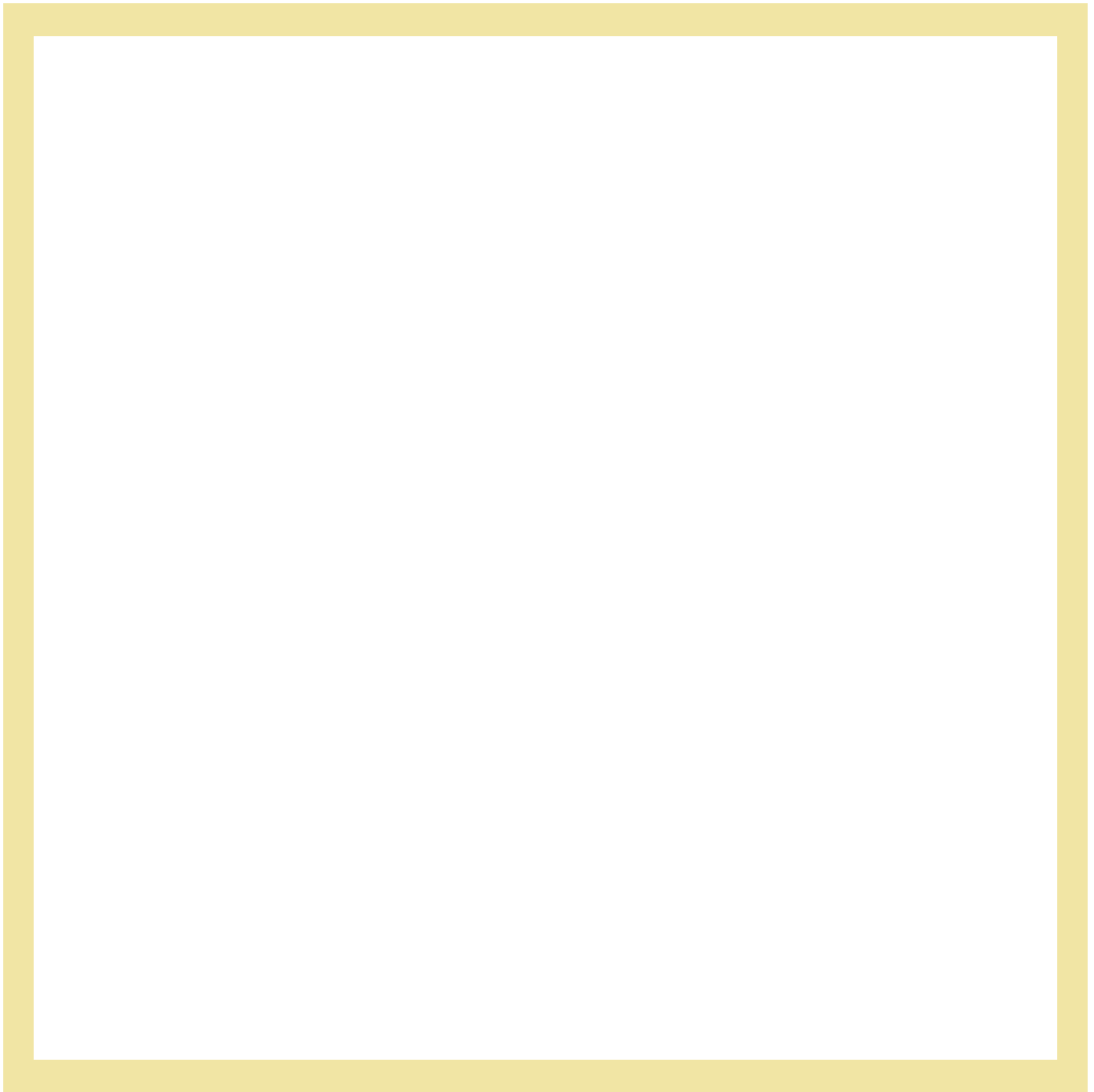
Consider how the Creed of the Council of Constantinople (the Creed normally professed in the context of the Eucharistic liturgy in the Latin Rite) attempts to preserve the essential content of the Creed of Nicaea while addressing the errors found in both Apollinaris and Theodore.

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# Apollinaris of Laodicea vs. Theodore of Mopsuestia and the First Council of Constantinople (381)

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# Antioch vs. Alexandria: The Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon

Suggested readings: Richard A. Norris, Jr., trans., ed., *The Christological Controversy, Sources of Early Christian Thought*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 123–159.

Common Christological Declaration between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East (11 November 1994): available online.

Common Declaration of Pope Paul VI and of the Pope of Alexandria, Shenouda III (10 May 1973): available online

Why was the term Theotokos so problematic for the Antiochian school? Why did they find it an affront to the Nicæan Creed?

Beginning in the early twentieth century, Western scholars began to discover previously misappropriated texts and other texts previously unknown to them, which allowed a more accurate portrait of Nestorius' actual Christological views to distinguish themselves from the heresy of Nestorianism condemned at the Council of Ephesus. It becomes clear that Nestorius' views were in many respects caricatured by his opponents, and that his central concern was a point that, largely due to his own influence, became a central principle in Christology, which we call, the "communication of idioms." What does this mean?

Nestorius distinguishes a divine physis and a human physis in Christ, but he speaks ambiguously as regards the concept of person. The term *prosopon* is subject to a range of meanings, even by the time of Nestorius (in fact, this term never made it into any of the creedal statements in the early ecumenical councils), and at times can designate a juridical entity, like Microsoft Corporation, while at other times it can mean a particular subject. So, Nestorius speaks of Christ as one person with two natures, but then at other times speaks of the human person of Jesus being assumed by the divine person *Logos*. What heresies is Nestorius trying to avoid here? What valid points does Nestorius make? Where does his articulation ultimately fail? Is there warrant for the characterization of Nestorianism as the assertion that in the Christ, Jesus is one individual and the *Logos* is another, the two held together as a kind of legal fiction?

Cyril of Alexandria begins by saying that Christ has but one nature, in reaction to Nestorius. How does he attempt to avoid Apollinarism? What does he add to his definition that Apollinaris had explicitly denied?

# Antioch vs. Alexandria: The Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon

How are Nestorius and Cyril after the same thing—the complete humanity of Jesus? What are the particular merits of Cyril’s approach to this problem? What are its flaws?

Cyril eventually accepts a new articulation—that Christ is one hypostasis in two natures (the Greek word for “nature” here is *physis*). Thus he accepts the Duophysism eventually articulated by Leo and Chalcedon and rejects his former Monophysism. What do these two terms mean, respectively?

After the Council of Ephesus, the so-called Formula of Union clarifies many of the points of Nestorius and Cyril had each attempted to make in their own language, while avoiding the problems in their original articulations. How did this formula express the idea that the Logos could actually be born of the Virgin Mary without being generated by her ontologically, as to the divine nature, according to which he exists eternally as person? Explain how this insight comes to expressed in the odd-seeming formulation that Christ is a Person who is human but not a human person.

Eutiches retained a strong Monophysite view following the Council of Ephesus, as a reaction against Nestorianism, which had been formally condemned. Why does this view fail? Remember that the full divinity and the full humanity of Christ are essential for Christianity to fulfill its fundamental eschatological goal. Can Monophysism pass this test?

How does the Creed of the Council of Chalcedon resolve the tension and avoid both Monophysism and Nestorianism?

What does the term hypostatic union mean?

Nestorius is venerated as a saint in the Assyrian Church of the East, but this Church does not profess the Nestorian heresy. Do you think that the Common Declaration of faith signed by Pope St. John Paul II and Katholikos Mar Dinka IV lays to rest the Christological controversy in such a way that, had it been presented at Ephesus, schism would have been avoided?

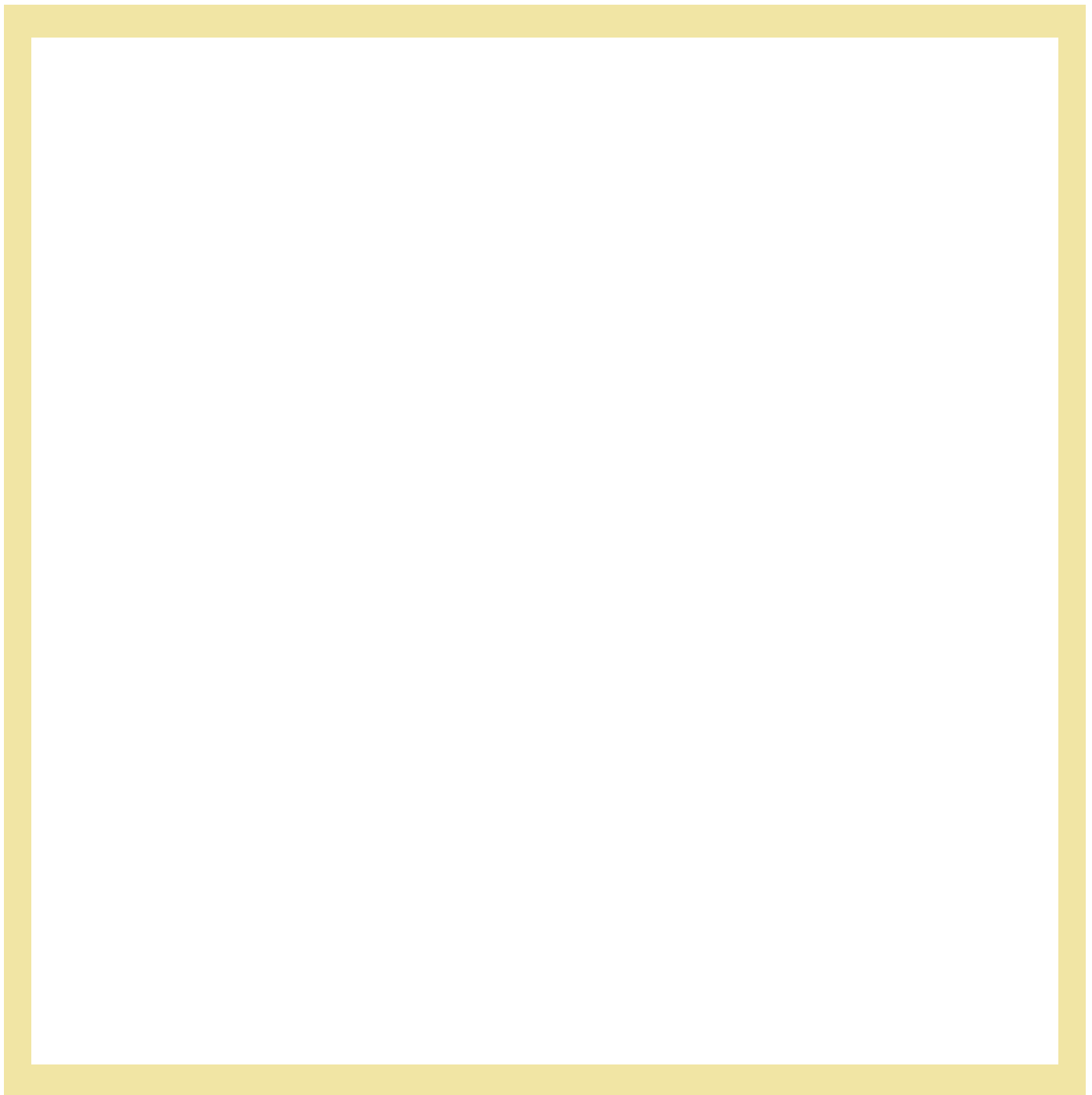
The Coptic Orthodox Church still identifies as Monophysitic, but in 1973, Pope Paul VI and Pope Shenouda III signed a Joint Declaration in which they explicitly agreed to a particular Christological articulation both found satisfactory. Do you think this formulation would have avoided schism at the Council of Chalcedon?

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# Antioch vs. Alexandria: The Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon

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# The Third Council of Constantinople (681)

Suggested readings: Definition of Faith of the Third Council of Constantinople (681): available online.

What does the term Monotheletism mean? How is it related to earlier controversies, like Apollinarism?

At first glance, Monotheletism seems a reasonable and pious Christological thesis. How does the view appear to coincide with the view of Christ as the fulfillment of the expectation of the Man of the Torah in the New Testament?

Why, in fact, does Monotheletism fail this test? Consider again the problems with Apollinarism and why that view failed. What about the view of Theodore of Mopsuestia? What are the similarities and differences between that view and Monotheletism? What is meant by “the two operations in Christ?”

If Christ is fully human, with every power of operation proper to human beings, and also fully God, with every power of operation proper to God, what can we say concerning Christ’s knowledge? Consider that in the New Testament, there are passages in which Christ appears to be ignorant of temporal events. Can Christ both know and not know the same truths at the same time? Would that be a contradiction, or is there more to this problem?

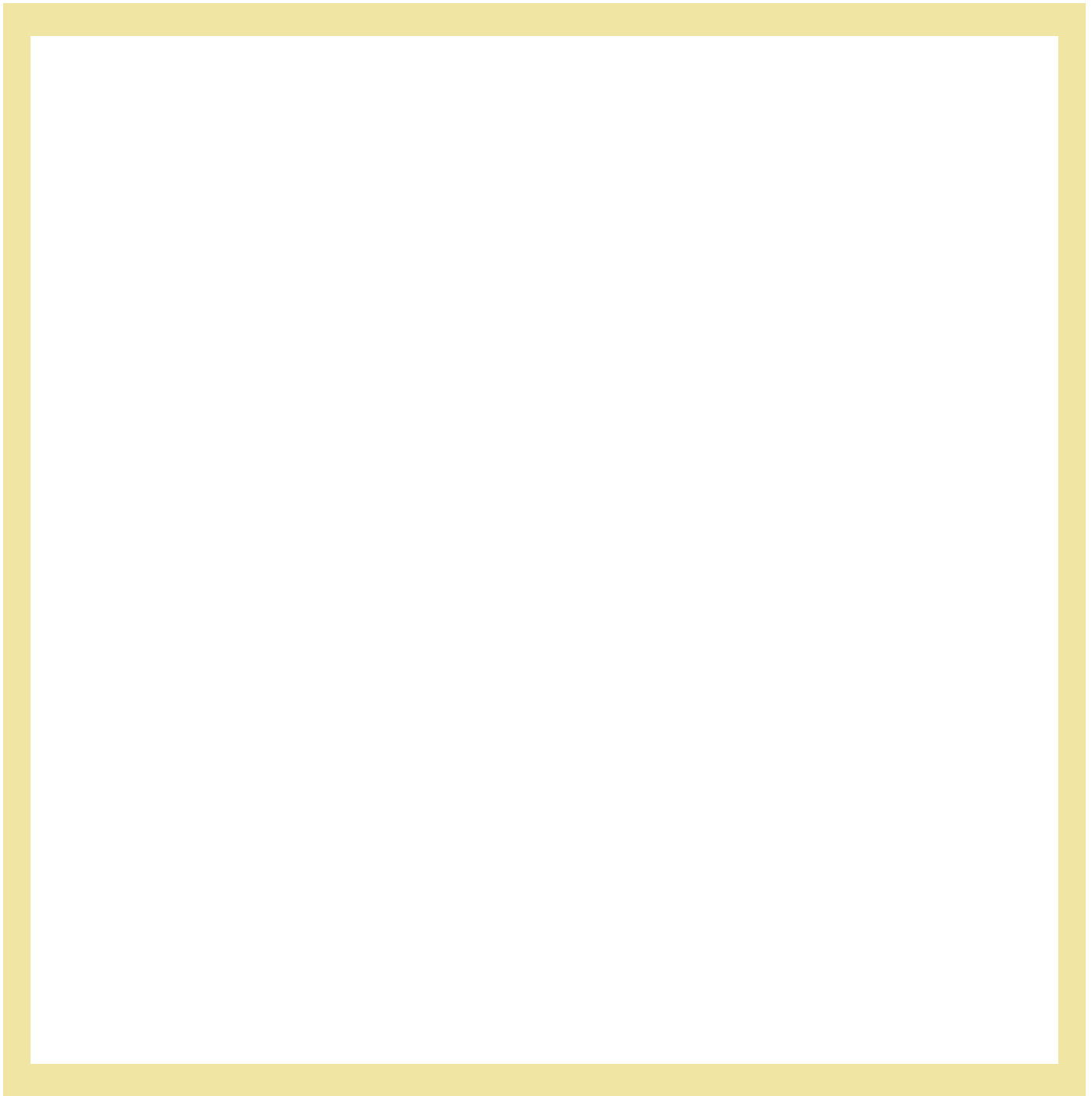
Does Christ possess the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love, or only love? Explain.

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# The Third Council of Constantinople (681)

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# Other Controversies and Concluding Comments

Similar in nature to earlier heresies, like Nestorianism, Adoptionism arose as a major and recurring problem in the late Patristic period or early Middle Ages, around the time of the Second Council of Nicaea (787). What were the Adoptionists really trying to say? How was their basic point an attempt to affirm the Chalcedonian faith? Why did they fail in this attempt?

Peter Abelard said that “Christ as a human being is nothing.” This affirmation, which was formally condemned as heretical, sounds Docetistic on the one hand, or Adoptionistic on the other. How? What do you think Abelard might have been trying to say?

St. Anselm of Canterbury poses the question “Why did God become a human being?” Ratzinger argues that, in doing so, Anselm inadvertently introduced a new question—not how but why—and thus obscured what had before been the obvious link between Christology and Eschatology, as well as other theological disciplines such as Soteriology and Ecclesiology. He argues that this separation of Christology as its own problem leads to an unanswerable conundrum concerning the reason for the Incarnation and purpose of creation. Can you explain Ratzinger’s perspective on this point? Hans Urs von Balthasar proposed that, in his descent into hell, Christ assumed the full weight of the penalty due to human sin: that in descending into hell, he descended into damnation. Why did Balthasar offer this proposal? What did he think it achieved? Why, finally, could it not be accepted as orthodox?

In the twentieth century, the Jesus Seminar sought to subject the question of orthodoxy to academic scrutiny, in a climate in which the academy had largely taken on a secular, scientific mentality. What was the result of this move? What positive contributions emerged from this work and what deeply negative influences did it have on Christian culture?

In the 1960’s the “Jesus Movement” involved an existentialist approach to the Christian question. Rather than definite ontological assertions about Christ, it proposed that Christ represents a fundamental challenge, and that before this challenge, each person had to take a stand. Out of this movement emerged such theatrical productions as “Godspell” and “Jesus Christ, Superstar.” In many ways, this movement involved an attempt to recover the historical humanity of Jesus, on account of which divine attribution represents such a significant theological difficulty, as it was in the time of Christ’s earthy ministry. What broader influences, both good and bad, did this approach to the problem of Christ have on Christian culture in our time? Between this movement and the Jesus Seminar, can you see how Christianity can be distorted and subsumed under secular, political agendas? Can an existential approach to the problem of Christ have its place in orthodox Christianity, though?