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‘THE CONDUIT TO CONVEIGH LIFE’:  
JAMES USSHER’S *IMMANUEL* AND  
PATRISTIC CHRISTOLOGY<sup>1</sup>

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James Ussher (1581-1656) was an influential Renaissance churchman and theologian but those familiar with him today only know his famous chronology.<sup>2</sup> Yet Alan Ford, Ussher’s twenty-first century biographer, catalogues accolades like that of the French theologian Alexander Morus (1616-1670) who nominated Ussher as ‘the Athanasius of our century’.<sup>3</sup> He was a prolific writer—the nineteenth-century collection of his *Works* consists of seventeen volumes dealing with church history, the Septuagint, politics and catechetics.<sup>4</sup> As Archbishop of Armagh he was primate of Ireland and thus deeply involved in politics with a close connection to leaders in England like the Archbishop of Canterbury and even the king. As broad as his interests and influence were, studies of Ussher’s patristic writings typically terminate at his work on Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35-c. 107).<sup>5</sup> While his text-critical discovery is important, other avenues of Ussher’s historical thought need exploring. This essay asks how a small part of Ussher’s work was shaped by his patristic studies. In 1638 he wrote *Immanuel, or The Mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God*, an exposition of the incarnation framed in patristic language. To consider this influence on *Immanuel* we begin with historical concerns with the

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<sup>1</sup> I am thankful to Michael A. G. Haykin, Dennis Ngien and Crawford Gribben who supervised the thesis that this article comes from.

<sup>2</sup> Recent studies include Alan Ford, *James Ussher: Theology, History, and Politics in Early-Modern Ireland and England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Jack Cunningham, *James Ussher and John Bramhall: The Theology and Politics of Two Irish Ecclesiastics of the Seventeenth Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); Crawford Gribben, *The Irish Puritans: James Ussher and the Reformation of the Church* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2003); and R. Buick Knox, *James Ussher: Archbishop of Armagh* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1967).

<sup>3</sup> Ford, *James Ussher*, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> C. R. Elrington and J. H. Todd eds., *The Whole Works of the Most Rev. James Ussher*, 17 vols. (Dublin: Hodges and Smith, 1847-1864).

<sup>5</sup> J. E. L. Oulton, ‘Ussher’s Work as a Patristic Scholar and Church Historian’, *Hermathena* 83 (November, 1956), 3-11.

text, and then turn to a summary of its core argument, concluding with an examination of the theological language Ussher uses to highlight how history shaped his Christology.

### *Provenance*

Questions of why and to whom Ussher wrote *Immanuel* are hard to answer. Externally there is no mention of *Immanuel* in his published letters dating from 1638.<sup>6</sup> Nor is there much discussion of it in biographical material. Ford mentions it once and Ussher's Victorian biographer, Charles R. Elrington, sheds a little light when he says that the treatise consists of sermon material preached some time previous in Drogheda. They are 'as simple as the nature of the subject would permit; it consists principally of a collection of texts from Scripture skilfully arranged. There does not seem any thing peculiar in his view of the subject'.<sup>7</sup> Within the text there is no reference to debate, though at its time Socinianism was proving to be a problem. R. Buick Knox mentions a visit to London in 1646 where Ussher stopped in Gloucester and visited the Universalist John Biddle (1615/1616-1652), but this occurred after the 1638 printing of *Immanuel*.<sup>8</sup> Due to Ussher's stature as an apologist, the uniqueness of *Immanuel* to his corpus is its non-polemical character.

A potential allusion to an audience is found in its dedication to the Laudian Thomas Wentworth (1593-1641) upon his becoming Lord Deputy of Ireland; Ussher gave him a copy as a new year's gift. This olive branch could be interpreted as a political move extended to Wentworth whose political and theological vision was different than Ussher's. The tract's concluding citation of Philippians 3:8 is curious—is it possible that *Immanuel* is a meditation on Christ during a time of suffering? Ussher lost political and ecclesial power to Wentworth and John Bramhall (*bap.* 1594-*d.* 1663) who became Bishop of Derry in May 1634. Bramhall's encroachment on Ussher's authority would not have been immediate, thus placing the writing of *Immanuel* around the time of Ussher's erosion of power. Elrington cites a letter from William Laud (1573-1645) to Wentworth where the Archbishop complains that Ussher did not send him a copy of *Immanuel*.<sup>9</sup> Could it be that Ussher quietly sought to demonstrate faithfulness to Christ in the face of losing power to the Laudians? There is

<sup>6</sup> Ussher, *Works*, vol. 16.

<sup>7</sup> Ford, *James Ussher*, p. 206; C. R. Elrington, *The Life of the Most Reverend James Ussher* (1847), in *The Whole Works of the Most Rev. James Ussher*, ed. by C.R. Elrington and J.H. Todd (Dublin: Hodges and Smith, 1847), 1, pp. 201-2.

<sup>8</sup> Knox, *James Ussher*, p. 68.

<sup>9</sup> Elrington, *Life*, 201.

no solid evidence to give a clear answer, but it is reasonable that he wrote to show fidelity under duress.

### IMMANUEL—A SUMMARY

As *Immanuel* is based on sermons, there is a structure that moves from the person to the work of Christ; it argues that the Mediator must have two natures to be Immanuel. While there is a lack of polemic in *Immanuel*, its apologetic substructure is evident. The treatise is a 'soteriological argument' for the two-natures of the Redeemer who saves sinners.<sup>10</sup>

### *The Mystery*

The subtitle is *The Mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God*. From this a twofold aim is evident: to give clarity where possible and to let mystery reign when reason reaches its limit. Ussher follows scripture, tradition, and reason, though at key points he submits to the supra-rationality of the incarnation.

He begins with the question asked by the 'holy prophet' in the sayings of Agur (Prov. 30:3, 4) about how God can be known: 'Who hath ascended up into Heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the winde in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is his SONS name, if thou canst tell?'<sup>11</sup> The answer, based on John 3:13, is the person whom the prophet calls 'the Son' and Isa. 9:3 calls 'Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace' (1). Ussher asks, if this is so, how the Son can converse from heaven with those on earth. How is it 'that the *Father of Eternity* should be *born in time*? and that the *Mighty*

<sup>10</sup> For this type of argument, see Serge S. Verkhovskiy, 'Some Theological Reflections on Chalcedon', *St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly*, 2.1 (1958), 3.

<sup>11</sup> James Ussher, *Immanuel, or The Mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God* (London: 1653), p. 1. *Immanuel* was published individually seven times in Ussher's lifetime: 1st ed., (Dublin, 1638); 2nd ed., (London, 1638), 3rd ed., (Oxford 1643); 4th ed., (London,); 5th ed., (London, 1647); 6th ed., (London, 1649). It was also published appended to *A Body of Divinitie* four times: 1st ed., (London, 1645); 2nd ed., (London, 1647); 3rd ed., (London, 1649); 4th ed., (London, 1653). Cf. James Ussher, 'Immanuel, or The Mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God' in *Works*, 4:573-617. For a critical edition see Ian Hugh Clary, "'The Conduit to Conveigh Life": An Evaluation of James Ussher's *Immanuel* in Light of Patristic Christology' (Unpublished master of theology dissertation, Toronto Baptist Seminary, 2010). This essay uses the 1653 edition which is identical in both its individual and *Bodie of Divinity* publications. Page references for citations to this edition will be included in the body of the essay.

*God* should become a *Childe*; which is the weakest state of Man himselfe?' The answer is found first in the name that Isaiah gives to the Son: '[T]he first letter of this great Name, is WONDERFULL.' Second, that the Son is wonderful is proven by the christophany to Manoah (Judg. 13:18, 19) where he is called wonderful and his deeds wondrous.

While the works of the Son in both testaments are wonderful, they pale in comparison to the incarnation—that Ussher says happened by virgin conception—'a thing so wonderfull, that it was given for a signe unto unbelievers seven hundred and forty yeares before it was accomplished' in the prophecy of Isa. 7:14 (2). This is the wonder 'that the Son of God should be "made of a Woman;" even made of that Woman, which was made by himselfe' (John 1:36; Col. 1:16).

### ***The Mystery (Partially) Revealed: Person***

Ussher asks how these paradoxical realities can be true. How can the Son speak from heaven yet be on earth, how is he inferior yet equal to his father, how is he both David's Son and Lord? The answer is classical Christology: 'The untying of this knot dependeth upon the right understanding of the wonderfull conjunction of the divine and humane Nature in the unity of the person of our Redeemer' ... 'For by reason of the strictnesse of this personall union, whatsoever may be verified of either of those Natures, the same may be truly spoken of the whole Person, from whethersoever of the Natures it be denominat' (3). How the fullness of God can dwell richly in the person of Christ, is answered by *unio personalis*; 'a personall and reall union', that does 'inseparably and everlastingly conjoyne' the infinite Godhead with Christ's 'finite Manhood' in the unity of his person.

After explaining how God relates to the created order Ussher spends the rest of *Immanuel* on the nature of the union in terms of person and nature. He in whom the fullness dwells is the 'person' and the fullness that dwells in the person is the 'nature'. The nature relates to the person in 'that the divine Nature did not assume an humane Person, but the divine Person did assume an humane Nature'.

Ussher maintains the integrity of the Trinity in his discussion of person and nature. While the incarnation is an *opus commune* of the three persons, it was necessarily the Son, not the Father or Spirit, who assumed a human nature. Nor did the Godhead dwell in the human nature. It was not the Father because the incarnation fixed a mediator between sinners and the Father, and it was not the entire Godhead because 'there should then a fourth Person necessarily have been added to the Godhead'. It had to be the 'Son' who was incarnated, if not 'there should have been two Sons in the Trinity'. In this classic view, there is thus 'no alteration ... made in the relations of the Persons of the Trinity'.

For proof of the *assumptio carnis*—that sinners might receive sonship by adoption—Ussher cites Galatians 4:4-7 so ‘that what relation Christ hath unto God by Nature, we being found in him have the same by Grace’ (4). Christology gives way to soteriology so that adoption is possible. Though Christ is distinct from those adopted into his family, they are yet in and for him; they are firstborns—like Israel in Exodus 4—‘by the grace of adoption’ and are heirs by incorporation into Christ.

Of the nature, Ussher argues that it is rooted in concrete, historical reality. It is ‘the seed of Abraham’, ‘the seed of David’, and ‘the seed of the Woman’. It is the Word made flesh who is really ‘the fruit of her wombe’. The Son did not only assume the substance of human nature but also its properties and qualities. Ussher quotes James 5:17 and compares the Son to Elijah who was subject to human passions—his footnote says, Ἠλίᾱς ἄνθρωπος ἦν ὁμοιοπαθῆς ἡμῖν. The Son was subject to human weaknesses and infirmities; he was made like his brethren but without sin. To support Christ as *impeccabilitas* Ussher quotes Augustine on impeccability in Psalm 29: ‘*Mediator factus est homo non iniquus*’. However, Augustine also says that Jesus was ‘*sed tamen infirmus*’.<sup>12</sup> Ussher is careful to distinguish between what he calls ‘personal infirmities’ and ‘general infirmities’. The Son in his *status humiliationis* does not suffer ‘madnesse, blindnesse, lamenesse, and particular kinds of diseases, which are incident to some onely and not to all men in generall’. Rather, he was susceptible to ‘hungring, thirsting, wearinesse, grieffe, paine, and mortality’—things common to humankind generally.

How it is possible that the two natures could come together in the unity of the one person Ussher is happy to confess ignorance: it ‘is an inquisition fitter for an Angelicall intelligence, then for our shallow capacity to looke after ... these are the things which the “Angels desire to stoop and looke into”’.<sup>13</sup> The burning bush is an example of the need to draw back before mystery; when Moses came close to the bush he trembled and hid his face and let mystery be mystery. If speculation about the *dualitas naturarum* gets too close, the response must be the awe of Moses. Such a wonderful mystery, according to Ussher, reminds people of their

<sup>12</sup> Ussher’s footnote of Augustine: ‘*Inter Trinitatem, et hominum infirmitatem, et iniquitatem, Mediator factus est homo non iniquus, sed tamen infirmus: ut ex eo quod non iniquus jungeretur Deo; ex eo quod infirmus, propinquaret tibi*. Aug. Præf. in enerrat. 2. Psal. 29.’ For a modern edition see Augustine, *Opera Omnia* (Paris: 1835), p. 191.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Ussher, ‘A Sermon Preached Before the King’s Majesty, 20th June, 1624, on the Universality of the Church of Christ’, in *The Whole Works of the Most Rev. James Ussher*, ed. by C.R. Elrington and J.H. Todd (Dublin: Hodges and Smith, 1847), 2, pp. 472-3.

dust and ashes (6). This is not fideism but recognition of the limits of human knowledge. The incarnation is knowable according to what has been revealed. The purpose of this revelation is salvific and doxological—Abraham rejoiced to see this day. God set his habitation among his people and indwells them by the Spirit as though they were temples. This is the foundation of the promise that he will be their God and they will be his people, and the foundation of Christian unity. Though the mechanics of this wonder are beyond human means of discovery, Christians should not be indifferent; they should marvel at the wonder.

***The Mystery (Partially) Revealed: Work***

**The Dual-Nature Mediator.** Ussher ends his discussion of the two natures and transitions with the *opus theandricum* of mediatorship: the Mediator must be ‘God with us’. It is by his *munus* that he is Immanuel, for to be Mediator between God and humans he must ‘partake’ of both. The Mediator is ‘from all eternity consubstantiall with his Father’ and ‘must at the appointed time become likewise consubstantiall with his children’ to reconcile the two (7).<sup>14</sup> *Reconciliatio* is crucial because God and sinners are at enmity; for the Son to mediate ‘he must have an interest in both the parties’. In his mediation he turns the Father’s ‘favourable countenance towards us’. In the words of 1 John 2:1-2, sinners have an advocate with the Father, Christ Jesus, the propitiation of God’s wrath against sinners (8). Just as there is one God, so there is one Mediator between God and humans, the man Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 2:5). This Mediator gave himself as a ransom for all and ‘in discharge of this his office of mediation, as the onely fit umpire to take up this controversie, was to lay his hand aswell upon God the party so highly offended, as upon Man the party so basely offending’.

**Threefold Office: Priest, Prophet and King.** After establishing the two-nature necessity of Immanuel, Ussher considers the Mediator’s *munus triplex* of priest, prophet and king in the final section of the tract. Taking each in turn, he explains the intercessory nature of Christ’s priesthood in its relation to God, his intercessory role as prophet in respect of humans, and the dominion of his kingdom.

**The Dual-Nature Priest.** Christ’s priesthood receives the longest treatment, likely because this office relates to God, whereas the other two to humans. It could be that Ussher emphasizes the priestly office against

<sup>14</sup> Ussher argues that Christ is mediator in both natures. Cf. Carl Trueman, ‘From Calvin to Gillespie on Covenant: Mythological Excess or An Exercise in Doctrinal Development?’, *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 11 (2009), 378-97.

Roman Catholicism, indicating that only the priesthood of Christ is necessary.<sup>15</sup> Ussher distinguishes two functions in the *munus sacerdotale*. The first is the *satisfactio Christi* and the second the *intercessio Christi*: 'The former whereof giveth contentment to God's justice; the latter solliciteth his mercy, for the application of this benefit to the children of God in particular' (8). Of *satisfactio* Ussher speaks of the Mediator's role as a propitiation (*hilasmos*) for sin. God's 'love to justice, and hatred to sinne' was such that he would not have justice swallowed up in mercy, nor would sin merely be pardoned without restitution (8-9). God's wrath must be appeased and a ransom must be paid (*lytron anti pollōn*). The Mediator must take upon himself the role of 'Advocate' in order 'to plead full satisfaction made by himself' (9). As for *intercessio*, the Mediator stands in the presence of God on behalf of sinners and makes requests for them. The two natures of Christ are important for true intercession to take place. Heb. 4:16 speaks of Christ as the High Priest who shares in his people's temptations, yet without sin. To do so, the Mediator must share in the nature of those for whom he intercedes.

The Mediator must also be human due to covenantal obedience. Adam, the party of the first covenant, was 'tyed to this obedience' yet failed; his disobedience made his offspring sinful. Another man is needed to perfectly obey the stipulations of that first covenant. As it was a human representative who disobeyed the first covenant, so it must be a human mediator that obeys. Yet, 'being God, as well as man, he by his owne "eternall Spirit" preserved himselfe without spot: presenting a far more satisfactory obedience unto God, then could have possibly been performed by Adam in his integrity.'

Ussher discusses the *sanctificativa* of the human nature of Christ.<sup>16</sup> Adam was unable to sanctify himself; rather his holiness was derivative—received by virtue of being *imago Dei*. Had he obeyed in the Garden, Adam could only say, 'I am an unprofitable servant; I have done that which was my duty to doe'. But Christ, whose human nature was sanctified by the divine, was able to obey God's law 'and so out of his owne peculiar store did he bring forth those precious treasures of holy obedience, which for the satisfaction of our debt he was pleased to tender unto his Father'. Because of the human nature's sanctification, 'the Son

<sup>15</sup> I owe this insight to Michael A. G. Haykin.

<sup>16</sup> The sanctification of Christ's human nature is not new, W. G. T. Shedd cites Augustine, John of Damascus, Anselm of Canterbury, Francis Turretin, Westminster Larger Catechism Q. 37, John Gill, and Jonathan Edwards who taught this. William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969), pp. 296-308.



advanced our nature into the highest pitch of dignitie, by admitting it into the unitie of his sacred Person' (10). Christ is a better Adam because in his humanity he dignified human nature.

The Son's works of obedience include circumcision and baptism. The apostle Paul said that a man who is circumcised is a debtor to the whole law. Similarly, John's baptism—that Jesus underwent—was one of repentance. Jesus had no moral requirement due to his sinlessness, but submitted to both to fulfil all righteousness (11). These were works of supererogation 'which would be put upon the account of them whose debt he undertooke to discharge; and being performed by the person of the Sonne of God, must in that respect not onely be equivalent, but infinitely overvalue the obedience of *Adam* and all his posteritie'. The merit earned by Christ would purchase the righteousness for those whom he represented.

Sinners not only have a debt of obedience that must be paid, they also suffer the debt of 'forfeiture and *nomine pœnae*'. Obedience is owed due to sin that Ussher likens to a 'default' on a loan or promise. The payment comes by *nomine poenae*, where a lessee (sinner) would owe a lessor (God). Christ is the surety 'who standeth chargeable with all our debts, as he maketh paiment for the one by his *Active*, so must he make amends for the other by his *Passive* obedience: he must first suffer, and then enter into his glory'. The *obediencia Christi* is the payment that sets debtors (*opheiletai*) free from the legal ramifications of not being able to make good on what is owed. The Captain of salvation paid the debtors' penalty by suffering on the cross.

Ussher asks how the suffering of the Son relates to the doctrine of divine impassibility. He says that 'the Godhead is of that infinite perfection, that it cannot possibly be subject to any passion'. However, the Son suffered and died on the cross. His answer alludes to the *communicatio idiomatum*: the Mediator has more than just a divine nature. Suffering was requisite for the payment of the debt, so the Mediator must be human. It was the human nature that suffered because it was human nature (generally) that transgressed. What happens to the nature can be predicated of the person, so it can be said that the Son did suffer while not denying divine impassibility.

The work of Christ on the cross purchased and conveyed redemption for the sons of men; its price was the blood of the Son. 'But', Ussher inquires, 'what should the purchase of a stranger have been to us?' (14). In his human nature, the Son so identifies with the redeemed that Ussher likens him to kin. In the Old Testament a person who was 'the next of kinne' had the right to be called 'the Redeemer'. In Job 19:25-27 Job appeals to God as his 'Goël' or 'Redeemer'. Ussher says that 'we may easily understand, that his and our Redeemer was to be the invisible God; and yet in

his assumed flesh made visible even to the bodily eyes of those whom he redeemed'. For the invisible God to be the Redeemer of humanity he had to assume flesh and blood in order to be their kin, otherwise, 'how could he therein have been accounted our *next* of kinne?' There must be a natural link between the Redeemer and the redeemed in a community of race not only because of Old Testament familial teaching, but also due to the origin of sin and redemption. '[T]he guilt of the *first man's* transgressions is derived unto us by the means of carnall generation' (15). Thus redemption can only come to sinners by 'spiritual regeneration'. The Saviour did not disdain calling the redeemed his children, so new birth is possible 'for who else was able to make this 'new creature', but the same God that is the Creator of all things?' (15-16). These 'new babes' are born of the Spirit who 'proceeds' from the Father and the Son (16).

Ussher further opens the mystery of the incarnation by speaking of two of its effects: '[I]n every perfect generation the creature produced receiveth two things from him that doth beget it: *Life* and *Likenesse*'. In some contexts creatures do not necessarily carry the likeness of their creator—such as a painting or creatures bred out of mud—but in the 'proper course of generation' every creature begets its like.<sup>17</sup> Ussher argues from various New Testament texts that if obedience and sufferings were experienced by a bare man, even though this man was perfect, they would 'be to no purpose'. The healer would approach the sinner who is dead and the balm would be of no use. The 'Physitian' must not only be able to restore sinners to health, but to life (16-17). None can do this 'but the Father, Son, and holy Ghost; one God, blessed forever' (17). A fitting summary is 1 Corinthians 15:45: 'The last *Adam* was made a quickning spirit'. His comment on this conjures an image of an instrument that transmits life: 'An *Adam* therefore and perfect Man must he have been; that his flesh, given for us upon the Crosse, might be made the conduit to conveigh life unto the world'. The crucified flesh of the Son is the pipeline through which life is conveyed to dead sinners.

Adam's fathering of a son in his own likeness shows that what is born of flesh is flesh and what is born of spirit is spirit. Citing 1 Corinthians 15:48, Ussher says that the change from the earthly to the heavenly will occur when Christ returns and fashions his people into his perfect image. Though a future event, it does not negate the need for conformity to Christ's image in the present. Christians are called to put off the old man and put on the new. Just as man is the image and glory of God and woman

<sup>17</sup> Ussher quotes Horace's *Odes* 4.4: 'nec imbellem feroces Progenerant aquila columbam', translated 'nor do savage eagles produce a peaceful dove'.

is the image and glory of man, so too is Christ the image of God. Christians are to be conformed to his image.

Image and likeness go beyond the individual to the corporate church; in the words of John 11:52 and Ephesians 1:10, Christ gathers into one the children of God from all over—those in heaven and earth—to bring them under one Head. Ussher likens the unity between the church triumphant and the church militant to the veil in the tabernacle and ‘as farre the one from the other as Heaven is from Earth, yet is made but one Tabernacle in Jesus Christ’ (18). They are a habitation of God in the Spirit who unites them to Christ in a ‘mysticall union’ bringing all under one Head that is ‘of the same nature with the Body which is knit unto it’ and the body derives life from it (19). The *unio mystica* is expanded in three ways. First, Christians are truly joined to Christ. Second, the union is made immediately with the human nature of Christ. Third, the body and blood of Christ is made ‘fit food for the spirituall nourishment of our soules’. The union that Christians have with Christ grounds their boldness to enter into the most holy place because they can by his blood. The vision of Jacob and the ladder spanning heaven and earth—applied by Jesus to himself—is a fitting image. Mixing metaphors, Jesus is the bridge over which sinners pass into heaven.

**The Dual-Nature Prophet.** In the next two sections Ussher pays comparatively less attention to the offices of prophet and king, though this does not mean that what he says is less significant. Christ’s *munux propheticum*, like the *munux regium* and unlike the *munux sacerdotale*, relates to things concerning humans. As prophet, Christ’s role is to ‘openeth the will of his Father unto us’ (20). While priests in the Old Covenant instructed people in the law, prophets are distinguished from them as their office was for instruction. The same is true for prophets in the New Covenant.

Ussher gives ‘singular preheminece’ to Moses above all other prophets because God said that he was ‘faithfull in all mine house;’ God spoke with Moses ‘mouth to mouth’. Christ, as Mediator, is ‘in a more peculiar manner likened unto *Moses*’ regarding his prophetic office. God says in Deut. 18:25 that he will raise up a prophet in the midst of Israel who is like him. This prophet will be come from his ‘Brethren the *Israelites*’ and so must be a human (21). As a mediator Moses could only speak to God on behalf of Israel indirectly, therefore a Mediator is needed who can go into the presence of God as an equal. Christ abolishes the veil that separates God and his people, so that through him God’s glory can be revealed. In the image of Christ, God’s people can approach him without fear. This is ‘daily effected by the power of the Ministry of the Gospell, instituted by the authority, and seconded by the power of this our great Prophet’. Christ

is worthy to have more glory than Moses, for just as Moses was faithful in God's house, Christ is the Son over his own house, the church. Christ is the Lord of the church, is its only builder, and so receives more glory.

Christ is greater than the other prophets for two reasons. First, no one knows the Father but the Son who reveals and declares him. This knowledge of the Father is qualitatively better than what comes from the prophets, who need the Spirit to guide them, because Christ himself gives the Spirit. Second, prophets and apostles can only plant and water but it is God alone who 'can give the increase' (22). Apostles and prophets have derivative authority that comes by Christ via the Spirit. Only God is able to breathe the breath of life and raise the dead; the natural man is blind and cannot perceive the things of the Spirit. The ministry of life that the apostles discharge comes from the power of God, 'and consequently, [Christ] in this respect also, must be *God* as well as *Man*' (23).

**The Dual-Nature King.** The final section of *Immanuel* concerns the *munux regium*; the kingdom of Christ that is the rule and protection that he exercises over his people. Isaiah described Christ's kingdom in Isaiah 9:7 as everlasting, Davidic, and ruled in justice. Daniel 7:13 explains that the Ancient of Days gives the Son of Man dominion, glory, a kingdom and a people from every language and nation that will not be destroyed. In the New Testament, the angel Gabriel tells Mary that she shall conceive a son who will be called Jesus who 'shall be great', and called the 'Son of the highest' who will be given the throne of David by God from where he shall reign over a kingdom that will have no end (23). The church can say of Christ, like Israel did of David, that 'we are thy bone and thy flesh'. She can 'sing' of Christ, as did David, that 'The Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou at my right hand, untill I make thine enemies thy foot-stool'. Christ the king is the fulfilment of the *protoevangelium* (Gen. 3:15).

Following the Reformed orthodox Ussher affirms a two-fold, rather than a three-fold, distinction in the kingdom of Christ. There are '[t]wo special branches' of his kingdom: the first is 'the one of *Grace*', and the second 'of *Glory*' (24). Grace is the branch whereby Christ governs the church 'which is Militant upon Earth'. Glory is the branch that governs 'that part which is Triumphant in Heaven'. On earth, and under grace, Christ in his prophetic office works upon the mind and understanding, but by his kingly office he works upon the will and affections.

The God who gives grace also gives glory. Ussher again uses an instrumental example when he speaks of Christ's humanity as 'the golden pipe' that conveys life by resurrection. He argues that the people of God, even sacramentally in the Eucharist, are nourished by Christ and will be raised up with him at the last day. He shall return and be glorified in his saints

and be made marvellous in them. In turn, he will change their base bodies and fashion them in the image of his glorious body, 'according to the working, whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himselfe'. He then concludes with a benediction taken from Revelation 1:5-6.

#### THE PERSON OF IMMANUEL AND CHALCEDONIAN CHRISTOLOGY

In *The Method of the Doctrine of the Christian Religion*, published in 1654 but written around 1603, Ussher asks: 'How many natures be there in Christ?' The answer: 'Two; the Godhead, and the manhood; remaining still distinct in their substance, properties and actions'. He elaborates asking: 'How many persons hath he?' The answer: 'Only one; which is the person of the Son of God'.<sup>18</sup> The *Irish Articles*—written largely by Ussher in 1615—concur 'that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhoode were inseparably ioyned in one person, making one Christ very God and very man' (6.29). This reflects Chalcedon's statement, '[W]e apprehend this one and only Christ—Son, Lord, only-begotten—in two natures'.<sup>19</sup> Chalcedon is also echoed in the *Irish Articles* as they affirm 'this selfsame one is also actually God and actually man'.<sup>20</sup>

Such quotations mirror what we have seen in *Immanuel*. Early on Ussher writes, 'Now there dwelleth in him not onely the fulnesse of the *Godhead*, but the fulnesse of the *Manhood* also' (3). And again, 'he in whom the fulnesse of both those natures dwelleth, is one and the same *Immanuel*, and consequently it must be believed as firmly, that he is but one *Person*'. Ussher explains what he means by person and nature when he says, 'Hee in whom that fullnesse dwelleth, is the *PERSON*: that fulnesse which so doth dwell in him, is the *NATURE*'. *Immanuel* describes the traditional understanding of how the two natures relate in the one person. Ussher explains that the divine nature, in relation to the Father, and the human nature, in relation to human beings, are 'consubstantiall'. Christ is the Son 'being from all eternity consubstantiall with his Father' (7). In his divine nature Christ is the Father's equal and shares in the essence of the divinity with the Father. As Chalcedon says, 'He is of the same reality as God as far as his deity is concerned'.<sup>21</sup> Chalcedon expresses 'of the same reality' with the word *homoousios*; a word that also describes the Son as

<sup>18</sup> James Ussher, 'The Method of Christian Religion', in Ussher, *Works*, 11, p. 208.

<sup>19</sup> 'The Definition of Chalcedon' in John H. Leith, *Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present* (Louisville: John Knox, 1982), p. 36.

<sup>20</sup> 'Definition of Chalcedon', p. 35.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

being 'of the same reality as we are ourselves as far as his human-ness is concerned'.<sup>22</sup> Ussher agrees when he says, 'he must at the appointed time become likewise consubstantiall with his children' (7) and that the Son is 'made of the substance of his Mother in the fulnes of time' (3). This explains how his Father should be *greater* than he. Christ is fully a human person who shares in all that is common to people, sin excepted. The *Irish Articles* say, 'The Sonne, which is the Word of the Father, begotten from euerlasting of the Father, the true and eternall God, of one substance with the Father, tooke mans nature in the wombe of the blessed Virgin, of her substance'.<sup>23</sup>

How do the two natures relate to one another? Ussher—unlike some church fathers<sup>24</sup>—was happy to use the word 'conjunction' to express the *unio personalis*: 'The untying of this knot dependeth upon the right understanding of the wonderfull conjunction of the divine and humane Nature in the unity of the person of our Redeemer' (3). Ussher explains the *unio personalis* as a *unio realis*: '[T]hat is to say by such a personall and reall union, as doth inseparably and everlastingly conjoyne that infinite Godhead with his finite Manhood in the unity of the selfe-same individuall Person'. Though he distinguishes between the two, Ussher clearly affirms the union of divine and human in Christ's person. In *A Bodie of Divinitie* Ussher calls the union of natures both 'The hypostaticall or personall union of both into one *Immanuel*'.<sup>25</sup> Union is understood by Ussher as a kind of perichoretic coinherence of natures.<sup>26</sup> It is the assumption of

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> *Irish Articles*, 6.29.

<sup>24</sup> For instance, Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Unity of Christ*, trans. by John A. McGuckin (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995), pp. 73-4.

<sup>25</sup> James Ussher, *A Body of Divinitie* (London: Thomas Downes and George Badger, 1653), p. 160. Ussher asks, 'Was this union of the body and soul with the Godhead, by taking of the manhood to the Godhead, or by infusing the Godhead into the manhood?' His answer distances Ussher from Nestorianism: 'By a divine and miraculous assuming of the humane nature (which before had no subsistence in it self) to have his beeing and subsistence in the divine; leaving of it one naturall personship which otherwise in ordinary men maketh a perfect person; for otherwise there should be two Persons and two Sons, one of the holy Virgin *Mary*, and another of God, which were most prejudiciall to our salvation.' Ussher, *A Bodie of Divinitie*, p. 165.

<sup>26</sup> Crisp refers to this as 'nature-perichoresis' and points to its patristic pedigree in Gregory of Nazianzus, Maximus the Confessor and John of Damascus and is related to, though not to be confused with, *communicatio idiomatum*, Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity*, pp. 4-5. I am indebted to Dennis Ngien for clarification on this point.

the human nature by the divine so that the human is drawn into the oneness of the divine person, without the commingling of natures. Ussher speaks of a human nature that is 'assumed into the undivided unity of Gods owne person' (6). The human nature is brought close to God by the Spirit. Ussher teaches a nature-perichorersis in Christ; the asymmetrical relation between the natures where the divine penetrates the human but the human does not penetrate the divine.<sup>27</sup> For human redemption to be possible, Christ had to be the sinner's next of kin. Therefore the union had to be personal and inseparable: 'For if he had not thus assumed our flesh; how should we have been of his blood, or claimed any kindred to him?' (14). The incarnation establishes the community of race so that true redemption is be made possible. How such a union of extreme opposites is possible Ussher does not know, due to the limits of his human understanding, it 'is an inquisition fitter for an Angelicall intelligence, then for our shallow capacity to looke after' (5). He reflects the Reformed aphorism *finitum non capax infiniti*, though he does not elaborate how the limitations of human knowing have an effect on the human nature.

While the union is real, so that Christ is not a double-person, Ussher does not dispense with the two natures as though they were mere abstractions in the person. The natures constitute a concrete reality and are in such a real union that what is predicated of either nature can be predicated of the whole person. Because the union is real, 'whatsoever may be verified of either of those Natures, the same may be truly spoken of the whole Person' (3). This is the patristic, even Antiochene, understanding of the *communicatio idiomatum* that the Reformed orthodox inherited. The *idiomata* are the things that are proper to a nature, so Ussher could say in regard to the human nature, 'Neither did he take the substance of our nature onely, but all the properties also and the qualities thereof' (4). Each 'nature remaineth entire in it selfe, and retaineth the properties agreeing thereunto' (6). In patristic theology the *communicatio idiomatum* was a means of stressing the humanity of Christ that did not lose its integrity after its assumption by the second Person of the Trinity.<sup>28</sup> When Jesus experienced hunger, he did so in his human nature, yet hunger could be ascribed to the whole Person. Likewise, when Jesus calmed the sea, he did so in his divine nature, but the action is that of the Person. Ussher fol-

<sup>27</sup> See Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity*, p. 19, who says, 'This asymmetry is in part due to the fact that the divine nature exists prior to the Incarnation, whereas the (individualized) human nature does not. Moreover, this penetration of the human nature by the divine nature of Christ does not involve the transfer of properties from the divine to the human nature.'

<sup>28</sup> See Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon* (451) (London: Mowbray, 1965), pp. 473-4.

lows the Reformed orthodox in affirming the *communicatio idiomatum in concreto* by speaking of what is 'denominated' of the natures and by locating the communication of properties in 'the strictness of this personal union' rather than the natures themselves.<sup>29</sup>

Ussher cites the heart of the Definition of Chalcedon when he speaks of the unity of the two natures that are distinct in their integrity. Using the Trinity as an analogy he says, 'as the distinction of the Persons in the holy Trinity hindereth not the unity of the Nature of the Godhead' likewise the two natures do not hinder the unity of Christ. '[S]o neither doth the distinction of the two natures in our Mediator any way crosse the unity of his Person, although each nature remaineth entire in it selfe, and retaineth the properties agreeing thereunto'. Yet these properties are 'without any conversion, composition, commixion, or confusion'. In Ussher's footnote he provides the original Greek rendering from the Definition: *ἀσυγχύτως, ἀτρέπτως, ἀδιαίρετως, ἀχωρίστως* and the Latin: '*inconfuse, incommutabiliter, indivise, inseparabiliter*' (6). Chalcedon maintains that the natures are without division or separation in the *actus unionis* in response to Nestorianism. It also affirms that the natures are united without change or confusion in response to the *confusio naturarum* of Eutychianism. Ussher does not deviate from this creedal balance. As he wrote earlier, '[T]herefore we must hold, that there are two distinct *Natures* in him: and two so distinct, that they doe not make one compounded nature: but still remaine uncompounded and unconfounded together' (3).

Ussher argues that the Son assumed a nature not a person. In *The Method of the Doctrine of the Christian Religion* he writes, '[F]or the second person in the Trinity took upon him, not the person but the nature of man; to wit, a body and a reasonable soul; which do not subsist alone, (as we see in all other men) but are wholly sustained in the person of the Son of God'.<sup>30</sup> He reflects Chalcedonian language when he writes that Christ has 'a rational soul and a body'.<sup>31</sup> More than that, Christ is one person because the Son assumed a human nature. That is, he assumed a body and a soul that subsists as the one person; he did not assume a person, he assumed a nature. The subsistence is sustained by the person of the eter-

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), s.v. '*communicatio idiomatum/communicatio proprietatum*', 72. See also Stephen R. Holmes, 'Reformed Varieties of the *Communicatio Idiomatum*', in *The Person of Christ*, ed. by S. R. Holmes and M. Rae (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2005), pp. 70-86.

<sup>30</sup> Ussher, *Works*, 11, pp. 208-9.

<sup>31</sup> 'Definition of Chalcedon', p. 35. Cf. Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Unity of Christ*, pp. 64, 67, 88, 109.



nal Son. Were this not the case, and the Son assumed a human person, not a nature, as with Nestorianism, there would be two persons. In *A Bodie of Divinitie* Ussher elaborates on the necessity of Christ singular personality: 'By a divine and miraculous assuming of the humane nature (which before had no subsistence in it self) to have his beeing which otherwise in ordinary men maketh a perfect person, for otherwise there should be two Persons and two Sons, one of the holy Virgin *Mary*, and another of God, which were most prejudiciall to our salvation'.<sup>32</sup>

This 'soteriological argument' for the two-natured Christ explains why he is necessarily the God-man due to the need for human salvation. The ultimate moment of salvation came in the stretch of three days when Jesus of Nazareth was crucified and then resurrected. The larger part of *Immanuel* deals with Christ's mediatorial role as it demonstrates the 'necessity' of the incarnation soteriologically.

At one place in his argument Ussher refers to Anselm of Canterbury's *Cur Deus Homo* (c. 1097-8) in a footnote (7).<sup>33</sup> He does not provide a citation for any piece of the work, but draws attention to its whole. It corresponds with Ussher's aims as the medieval scholastic sought to prove soteriologically that God necessarily had to become a human in order to save sinners. The language of necessity in *Cur Deus Homo* is apparent in *Immanuel*. Anselm argues that for a human person, who has offended God's honour, to have a relationship with God, a human Mediator is needed. He must not only be human, or God's character would not be honoured, but also God's equal to pay the ransom for sinners.<sup>34</sup> Ussher says, 'An *Adam* therefore and perfect Man must he have been; that his flesh, given for us upon the Crosse, might be made the conduit to conveigh life unto the world: and 'a quickning spirit' he could not have been, unlesse he were *God*, able to make that flesh an effectuall instrument of life by the operation of his blessed Spirit' (17).

As with 'conjunction', Ussher uses 'union' in both Christological and soteriological senses. He speaks of a union between Christ's two natures, but also of a sinner's relationship with Christ—this is the doctrine of *unio cum Christo* or *unio mystica*—he calls it the 'mysticall union betwixt Christ and us' (18). Ussher argues that Christ's purpose in salvation was 'to "bring all unto one head by himselfe, both them which are in Heaven and them which are on the Earth"'. The corporate element of this is in the

<sup>32</sup> Ussher, *Bodie of Divinitie*, p. 165.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Anselm of Canterbury, 'Why God Became Man', in *The Major Works*, ed. by Brian Davies and G.R. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 260-356.

<sup>34</sup> Anselm, 'Why God Became Man', p. 321.

church militant and triumphant who, although separated just as earth and heaven are, will come together finally in Christ. Using John 6:63 Ussher explains that the bond of the *unio mystica* is the 'quickning Spirit'. The Spirit is in Christ who is the Head of the body and the Spirit 'is from thence diffused to the spirituall animation of all his members'. Ussher cites his 1620 sermon before parliament where the Holy Spirit's role in union with Christ is more fully explained.<sup>35</sup> Ussher preaches about the Spirit as the 'ground and foundation of this spiritual union'.<sup>36</sup> The mystery of union with Christ consists in 'the selfsame Spirit which is in him, as in the Head, is so derived from him into every one of his true members, that thereby they are animated and quickened to a spiritual life'.<sup>37</sup> The response of the quickened sinner, Ussher says in *Immanuel*, is 'faith' (18).

## CONCLUSION

Reformed orthodoxy had a rich Christology, as recent studies have shown.<sup>38</sup> Many evangelicals today fail to appreciate their heritage, and as a result, their theology. Ussher's *Immanuel*, as it provides a non-polemical and historically informed Christology, is representative of post-Reformation expositions of the incarnation and serves as a helpful introduction to those fearing to get lost in denser works by thinkers from this period. As we have demonstrated, Ussher maintains a careful Chalcedonian orthodoxy, and plainly explains the person and work of Christ as revealed in Scripture.

*Immanuel* also serves as a fitting introduction to the theology of one of the post-Reformation's great thinkers. William Chappell (1582-1649) said of him, 'His excellent Holiness; continuall diligence in Reading writing & preaching; Choicest skill in Antiquity Theology, and euey kind of more man like learning, matcht ith equall Humilitie there is not any need of larger praises nor haue I a mind (or power) there vnto'.<sup>39</sup> With such words from an Arminian opponent in Ireland, the value of studying Ussher, whatever one's theology, is indeed high.

<sup>35</sup> James Ussher, 'A Sermon preached before the Commons House of Parliament, 18th February, 1620', in Ussher *Works*, 2, pp. 415-58

<sup>36</sup> Ussher, 'Sermon', p. 432.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> For example Mark Jones, *Why Heaven Kissed Earth: The Christology of the Puritan Reformed Orthodox Theologian, Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680)* (Reformed Historical Theology, 13; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010); Alan Spence, *Inspiration and Incarnation: The Coherence of Christology in John Owen* (London: T & T Clark, 2007).

<sup>39</sup> Leeds University Library, Brotherton MS Lt 91. I owe this source to Crawford Gribben.