SUFFERING IMPASSIBLY

Christ's Passion in Cyril of Alexandria's Soteriology

J. Warren Smith

Between the outbreak of the Theotokos controversy in 428 and the Council of Ephesus of 431, Cyril of Alexandria addressed a short treatise entitled "On the Right Faith" to the Emperor Theodosius II's wife, Eudocia, and his sister, Pulcheria. This was the third such treatise Cyril wrote in the hope of gaining imperial support in his dispute with Nestorius. A little more than halfway into the work, Cyril asserts that Nestorius' two-subjects Christology confers upon the human subject of the incarnation "equality of worth and power...with God the Word." To suggest that the divine subject and the human subject share an equality of power and worth, Cyril claims, strips the Word of the power proper to his divine nature, conferring on the Word the weakness of human nature. The absurd implication of this suggestion Cyril explains,

It would consequently be fitting also for the Word to fear death, to look upon danger with suspicion, to weep in temptations, and in addition to learn obedience by what he suffered when tempted. Nevertheless, I
think it completely foolish either to think or say this, since the Word of God is all powerful, stronger than death, beyond suffering, and completely without a share in fear suitable to man. But though he exists this way by nature, still he suffered for us. Therefore, neither is Christ a mere man nor is the Word without flesh. Rather, united with a humanity like ours, he suffered human things impassibly (πάθοι άπαθως) in his own flesh. Thus, these events became an example (ύποτύπωειν) for us in a human fashion, as I said to begin with, so that we might follow in his steps (τούς ϊχνεσιν αύτου έπακολουθήσωμεν).

What is particularly frustrating about this passage is that Cyril does not follow up this provocative suggestion by explaining what it might mean that Christ “suffered impassibly.” Were this an isolated instance of the expression, one could dismiss it as a one time, unsuccessful flirtation with the rhetoric of paradox. However, in later works, such as Scholia on the Incarnation of the Only Begotten and On the Unity of Christ, Cyril continues to employ the expression. Therefore, we must take the phrase “suffering impassibly” to be a serious component of Cyril’s thought and so must explore the logic behind this nuance of his Christology. Nestorius dismissed the term as Cyril’s weak attempt to conceal his true theological move, abandoning the doctrine of divine impassibility. Recent interpreters have treated the enigmatic expression simply as Cyril’s affirmation of the paradoxical nature of the Incarnation. According to John J. O’Keefe, Cyril finds himself on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, he wants to give priority to the biblical narrative, which declares that the divine Christ suffered and died, over the Antiochene’s philosophical concern with God’s impassibility. Yet on the other hand he does not want to be labeled a theopaschite. Therefore, Cyril adopts the paradoxical language of “suffering impassibly” which attempts to assert two necessary claims about the Incarnation, that the Christ in the fullness of the hypostatic union genuinely suffered and yet that the divine did not suffer. Similarly, John McGuckin says that for Cyril “impass-

We must take the phrase “suffering impassibly” to be a serious component of Cyril’s thought and so must explore the logic behind this nuance of his Christology.

2. Scholia on the Incarnation of the Only Begotten 35; PG 75, 1409D.
4. See the forthcoming article, Paul Gavrilyuk, “Theopatheia:Nestorius’ Main Charge Against Cyril of Alexandria,” in Scottish Journal of Theology. Gavrilyuk notes that while Nestorius acknowledged Cyril’s explicit affirmation of the impassibility of God’s nature, he objected that a nature cannot be both capable of suffering and also impassible. Cf. Liber Heracidis I.3. Thus the key christological issue for Nestorius: since the divine nature is impassible one cannot make God the subject of Christ’s suffering in the flesh.
6. O’Keefe, p. 51. The Arian argument was that if the Word were the subject of every human operation, then the Word whose predicates are kατά φυσιν would be limited and affected by Christ’s suffering at the level of his nature. Cyril, following Athanasius, expresses the double judgement of Scripture in terms of a double predication. The first predication refers to the natural predicates of the Word. The second predication is an
sible suffering" was his attempt "deliberately to [maintain] both sides of the paradox with equal force and absolute seriousness of intent, refusing to minimize either reality." As Rowan Greer has put it, Cyril's religious concern — affirming the reality of Christ's passion — takes priority over any interest in being philosophically or theologically coherent. Certainly these conclusions are correct.

Yet my concern is that saying Cyril simply resorts to paradox, leaving us with this mysterious expression, does not explain why the expression is a true paradox — a seeming contradiction — and not simply an outright contradiction in terms which is wholly incoherent and theologically unhelpful. The thesis I will argue is that the phrase pathoi apathos should be interpreted in its strict grammatical sense, that is, apathos is functioning adverbially to qualify the character of pathoi. But "impassible suffering" is a theologically helpful category only if we can grasp how apathos qualifies or limits the character of the Word's passion. It is my position that Cyril's idea of "impassible suffering" is a conscious step toward equating impassability with immutability: Christ experiences suffering without being changed by the experience. Moreover I hope to show that "impassible suffering" is important in Cyril's thought for two reasons: 1) it preserves the inviolability of the divine in the hypostatic union, and 2) it illustrates the character of Christ's sanctification of human nature. "Impassible suffering" is not a property singular to the divine nature, but through the indwelling of the divine Word in the Incarnation it becomes an attainable ideal that Christ's followers are to imitate. To do this I need to look at three things: first, Cyril's Christology, which provides the framework for our investigation; second, Cyril's understanding of suffering and the sense in which Christ even during the passion escapes the effects of suffering; and third, the soteriological significance for us of Christ's impassible suffering.

CYRIL'S CHRISTOLOGY:
Incarnation as Hypostatic Union

The heart of Cyril's Christology is his insistence that Jesus is no mere man through whom the Word of God speaks. He is the incarnate deity

economic predication, i.e., the predicates the Word truly possesses as a result of the Incarnation. The former, however, are not compromised by the latter. See F.A. Sullivan, *The Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia* (Rome: Universitatis Gregoriana, 1956), p. 162.


It is my position that Cyril's idea of "impassible suffering" is a conscious step toward equating impassability with immutability. Thus Christ experiences suffering without being changed by the experience.

PRO ECCLESIA VOL. XI, NO. 4 465
The Incarnation of the Word frees humanity from death by communicating the incorruptibility of the divine nature to corruptible and passible human flesh. — the divine and human natures inextricably bound together in the unity of a single person or hypostasis possessed of a single personality. Cyril’s doctrine of the hypostatic union was driven by two soteriological concerns. First, the Word must be divine in order to free us from death; and second, the Word must genuinely experience suffering and death in order to conquer death itself, and provide an example for his disciples who would imitate the Lord’s passion in their own martyrdom. These two soteriological concerns are necessarily linked. For the hypostatic union which divinizes human nature, thereby freeing it from corruption and death, also sanctifies the soul such that it might master the baser passions of fear proper to our human nature and so stand fast in the face of temptation and persecution.

Cyril understands Christ’s conquest of death through the divinization of human nature as the result of the *communicatio idiomatum*. The Incarnation of the Word frees humanity from death by communicating the incorruptibility of the divine nature to our flesh. Even as water though cold by nature “all but forgets its own nature” when placed in a kettle set upon an open flame, becoming warm through the transfer of the fire’s energy, so too our bodies which are naturally corruptible abandon their weakness when mingling with the divine nature of the Word which is life. Christ overcomes corruption by revealing the archetypal image of human nature, and restores what was lost in Adam, namely, the Holy Spirit who seals the image of the incorruptible God upon our human nature. As the flower which sprang from the stem of Jesse (Isa 11.1-3), Christ is the one in whom human nature “blossomed again ... acquiring incorruption, and life, and a new evangelical mode of existence.”

9. Cyril conceives of the hypostatic union of the divine and human, not as the conjoining of two separate substances, but as substantial unity in which there is one substance, the Word, who governs the humanity he has assumed. Cyril’s tendency to speak of “one substance” is merely his insistence that there is one subject of the Incarnation, i.e., the Word. The source of much confusion for Cyril’s interpreters arises from his use of “nature” to denote the single subject of the Incarnation and alternatively the two elements in Christ Jesus. Richard A. Norris, “Toward a Contemporary Interpretation of the Chalcedonian Definition,” in *Lux in Lumine*, ed. R.A. Norris, (New York: Seabury Press, 1966), pp. 71-72. Cyril ultimately moves toward Chalcedon’s final proposal when he chooses to speak of the two natures *from which* the union is made instead of the two natures *in which* the union consists. See Rowan Greer, *The Captain of Our Salvation A Study in the Patristic Exegesis of Hebrews* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1973), p. 320.


11. On Isaiah, PG 70, 313C.

12. Cyril, Commentary on John 1.9, Pusey I. 91AB.

tion” (as Nestorius claimed); rather the Word must be fully united to our human nature. This, Cyril explains, is why John wrote in the prologue to his Gospel, “And the Word became flesh.” It would not have been enough simply to say that the Word “came into flesh”; rather John says that the Word “became flesh” “in order to exclude any idea of a relative indwelling, as in the case of the prophets and the other saints. He really did become flesh, that is to say, a human being.” He proceeds to qualify the Word’s “becoming flesh” by insisting that John should not be misinterpreted to suggest that a change occurred in the Word. That is, the Word did not give up his divine nature. For this reason John adds “and dwelt among us.” Therefore the divine and human though fully united remain distinct, without confusion or mixing. Yet though distinct they are inseparable, except at the conceptual level. Thus in Christ the two united natures exist side by side forming the composite character and personality of Jesus.

The hypostatic union has consequences for both the divine Word and for the humanity of Christ. The primary effect of the Incarnation upon the Word is that the Word experiences the weakness of human nature. One of Cyril’s favorite texts to support this point is the Christ hymn in Philippians 2. For Cyril the Word does not empty himself of his transcendent power or glory. Rather Cyril interprets kenosis to refer to that which the Word takes on himself, i.e., his humanity. In his Commentary on Isaiah, Cyril remarks that “having brought himself down to the level of self-emptying, [the Word] should not repudiate the low estate arising from that self-emptying, but should accept what is full by nature on account of the humanity, not for his own sake, but for ours who lack everything.”

When the Word became flesh taking a body for his very own, he experienced, along with the infirmities of embodiment, the full range of human emotions which accompany our mortal nature, such as fear and timidity.

14. Cyril quotes Nestorius, “There is no division in the conjunction, or in the dignity, or in the sonship. There is no division in his being Christ, but there is division between the divinity and the humanity.” Against Nestorius II, 6; trans. Russell, p. 148; AOC 1,1,6,42. Although Nestorius claimed that there was one indivisible Christ, this “indivisible conjunction,” Cyril contends, is only “a casual joining of one thing to another” either by spiritual concord or physical proximity.

15. Commentary on John 1.9; trans. Russell, p. 106; Pusey I, 95E.

16. “We do not ... say that the Word who is from the Father was transformed into the nature of flesh, or that the flesh changed into the Word. For each remains what it is by nature and Christ is one from both,” Commentary on John 1.9, trans. Russell, p. 117; Pusey I, 363B.

17. “[O]ur discussion of the union does not ignore the difference between the humanity and divinity] but nevertheless puts the division aside, not because we are confusing the natures or mixing them together, but because the Word of God, having partaken of flesh and blood, is still thought of as a single son and is called such,” First Tome Against Nestorius II,6; trans. Russell, p. 148; AOC 1,1,6,42-43.

18. “For after the Incarnation they [i.e., the human and the divine] are not divisible, except insofar as one knows that the Word that came from the Father and the temple that came from the virgin are not identical in nature. For the body is not consubstantial with the Word of God,” Commentary on John 4.2, trans. Russell, p. 115; Pusey I,361B.

own, he experienced, along with the infirmities of embodiment, the full range of human emotions which accompany our mortal nature, such as fear and timidity. 20 Indeed for Cyril, Christ’s suffering is no mere byproduct of the Word’s union with human flesh, rather it is the necessary means to accomplish the goal of the Incarnation. 21 Since Christ is the Son who became for us High Priest by offering himself on the cross as the perfect sacrifice fully sufficient for the expiation of all sin, he had to suffer and die. It was necessary for the Divine Word to “suffer for us in his own flesh” 22 in order as Hebrews 2.14-15 says “through death he might destroy him who has power of death.”

The hypostatic union effects not only the divinity, but also Christ’s humanity. For in him our humanity partakes of both the life-giving and the sanctifying power proper to the divine nature. The corollary of the Word’s humiliation in the kenosis of the Incarnation is the exaltation of human nature. Commenting on 2 Corinthians 8.9, “He was rich, yet for our sake he became poor,” Cyril explains that Christ’s condescension effected a “great exchange” between God and humanity. For while the Word “submitted to the limits of humanity ... thereafter man’s nature might come to possess the lofty honors of the divine majesty in Christ and put off the shame of poverty.” 23 In Against Nestorius, Cyril poetically describes the effect of the inseparable hypostatic union: the brilliance of the divine nature adheres to the human nature in the person

---

20. Commentary on John 8, Pusey II, 703E-704A. Cyril, contra Apollinaris, maintains that Jesus possessed a human soul; Ad Regnas De Recta Fide Oratio Altera 9, PG76, 1345D. For Apollinaris, the Word is substituted for the human soul of Jesus since the Word functions in Jesus as his soul, i.e., the life-giving source of his nature and existence. Successus objected that Cyril could not speak of the Incarnation as a substantial union since he recognized that Jesus had a rational soul. According to Cyril, the human soul of Jesus is the self-moving principle which gave natural life to the body. Since the soul, as Apollinaris maintained, is the source of the physis of a thing, Cyril having accepted the presence of a human soul in Jesus has trouble retaining Apollinaris’ one nature formula to express the unity of Christ. See Aloys Grillmeier, Christ in Christian Tradition Volume One From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451) 2nd edition, trans. J. Bowden (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), pp. 474-76.

21. Robert L. Wilken, Judaism and the Early Christian Mind: A Study of Cyril of Alexandria’s Exegesis and Theology (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1971), p. 182, contends that within the Christ-Adam typology Christ truly suffers, but his suffering is unique. Christ’s passion is not qualitatively but effectually different than our suffering. In other words, as I will argue later, Christ’s impassible suffering becomes an example for his disciples of how they can face the suffering of martyrdom. But, as Wilken rightly points out, Christ’s passion is unique because his suffering is ultimately salvific in its effect.

22. For our confidence in Christ as High Priest is because the sacrificial offering was the one who alone is without blemish. Cyril rhetorically asks Nestorius, who denied that the Divine Word suffered, “By whom, then, are we justified? Is it not in him who suffered death according to the flesh for our sake? Is it not in our Lord Jesus Christ? ... But if we believe that he who ‘suffered in the flesh’ is God, and that it is he who became our High Priest, we have not erred in any way.” Against Nestorius III.2, trans. Russell, p. 165; ACO 11,1,6, 61.

23. Ad Reginas De Recta Fide Oratio Altera 6, trans. Greer, p. 4; PG 76, 1344A.
of Christ Jesus as the shimmering brilliance inheres in the pearl or as
the sweet fragrance exists as a quality inseparable from the lily.\textsuperscript{24}

It is precisely the \textit{simultaneity} of the Word's \textit{kenosis} which endures hu-
man suffering and the Word's empowerment of his assumed humanity
that Cyril seeks to express in the phrase, \textit{pathoi apathos}. Cyril's Christ-
ology forces him to acknowledge that in the fully integrative unity of
the divine and human in Christ, the divine Word genuinely experi-
ences the limitations of our humanity, including suffering, and at the
same time preserves the perfection of his divine nature, including its
impassibility, in order to heal fallen human nature. Therefore, the ad-
verb \textit{apathos} is intended to qualify the character of Christ's suffering to
convey the idea that Christ's suffering did not compromise the very
power of the divine Word necessary to redeem humanity. To under-
stand what characteristics of suffering the word \textit{apathos} is intended to
exclude from Christ's passion, it is necessary for us now to examine
Cyril's understanding of suffering and its effects on those who suffer.

\textbf{THE NATURE OF SUFFERING AND CHRIST'S IMPASSIBILITY}

Suffering, for Cyril, is problematic especially if attributed to the deity
because suffering entails \textit{change}. Perhaps Cyril's clearest declaration of
what "suffering" means is found in his explanation of why the incar-
nate Word cannot be said to suffer, properly speaking. Commenting on
John 1:14, Cyril explains the evangelist's addition of the phrase "and
dwelt among us":

\begin{quote}
Having stated that the Word of God became flesh, he is anxious in case
anyone out of profound ignorance should assume that the Word has
abandoned his own proper nature and has in reality been transformed
into flesh and has suffered, which is impossible, for with regard to its
mode of being the divine is far removed from any kind of change or
alteration into something else.\textsuperscript{25}
\end{quote}

Here Cyril explicitly denies that it is possible for God to suffer since
the divine nature is immutable. While the creature who comes into
being is inherently subject to change, God belongs to the realm of the
eternal and so is, as Cyril puts it, "far removed from any kind of change
or alteration," which are the effects of suffering. Moreover, suffering
produces change that is degenerative. If the Word actually became
flesh, it would be a change from the perfection of the uncreated nature
to the imperfection of the created nature.

\begin{itemize}
  \item Suffering, for Cyril, is problematic especially if attributed to the deity
  because suffering entails change.
  \item Cyril explicitly denies that it is possible for God to suffer since the
divine nature is immutable.
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{24. Five Tomes Against Nestorius, II Proem, ACO I,1,6,33-34.}
\textsuperscript{25. Cyril proceeds to add, "The theologian [i.e., John] therefore very aptly added at
once: 'and dwelt in us,' so that realizing that he was referring to two things, the subject
of the dwelling and that in which the dwelling was taking place, you should not think
that the Word was transformed into the flesh, but rather that he dwelt in flesh...." Com-
mentary on John I.9, trans. Russell, p. 106; Pusey I, 96B-C.}
Suffering is degenerative change was the common place opinion in late antiquity. Even in cases where experiences of physical pain or discomfort produced salutary change, these episodes were viewed as remarkable precisely because the effect of the suffering was the opposite of the expected consequences. They are the exceptions which prove the rule. One example is found in the second century orator Aelius Aristides’ *Orationes sacrae*. Aristides’ ascending career as an orator was derailed when at the age of 26 he fell incurably ill. Becoming of a devotee of Asclepius, the god of medicine and healing, Aristides followed a harsh regimen of treatments inspired by the deity in order to purge his body of its sickness. On one occasion while traveling in Smyrna in the middle of winter Asclepius appeared to him in a vision and commanded him to bathe in the icy waters of a river whose banks were lined with frost covered pebbles. A crowd, including doctors, gathered on the banks to watch the spectacle. After swimming for some time and slashing himself with water, Aristides came out of the river; yet to the surprise of everyone, including Aristides, he showed no ill effects of the swim.

When I came out, all my skin had a rosy hue and there was a lightness throughout my body.... My mental state was also nearly the same. For there was neither, as it were, conspicuous pleasure, nor would you say it was like human joy. But there was a certain inexplicable contentment which regarded everything as less than the present moment.... Thus I was wholly with the god.26

The atypical nature of this case highlights two key characteristics of suffering. First, unlike the normal effects of exposure to such freezing temperatures which would include turning blue or white with frostbite and a loss of mobility due to a lack of blood circulating to the limbs, Aristides’ body preserves its rosy coloration. His body, far from being sluggish, is light and he moves facilely. Second, and for our purposes more important, Aristides’ mental faculties, rather than being clouded or unable to focus, remain unchanged. This episode stands out as exceptional precisely because he does not experience the freezing cold as the source of suffering which would normally impair both his physical strength and agility and his mental stability. Although Aristides was exposed to threatening environmental forces which are often the source of suffering, he does not describe himself as having suffered precisely because he experienced neither the adverse physical nor deleterious mental changes which are the common result of such exposure.

In contrast with Aristides, Cyril’s Christ does suffer; yet Cyril insists he does not experience the deleterious effects normally associated with suffering. In other words, Cyril’s Christ does suffer, but he does not change. For change cannot be admitted of the divine nature. Commenting on Isaiah’s vision of God in the Temple, Cyril explains the symbol-
ism of God's being "seated on a throne, high and lifted up." The throne is described as "set on high" to represent "the glory of God's rule ... transcending every intelligible nature." That God is seated on the throne, as opposed to standing on his feet and in motion, indicates God's "steadfastness ... and the enduring nature and immutability of God's blessing." Here the term immutability refers not just to "God's blessing," i.e., the divine disposition toward humanity, but also to the divine nature itself. For immediately Cyril, after quoting Baruch 3.3, "For thou art enthroned for ever and we are perishing for ever," contrasts our created nature which is subject to limitation and to decay with One who is seated upon the Throne, "Wisdom who is craftsman and creator of all things. That is to say, her immutability is unshakable." Thus Wisdom's immutability stands in contrast to our decay and corruption.

Even during the Incarnation, Cyril insists, the divine nature retained its immutability. Of particular concern to Cyril in the dispute over Mary's status as "mother of God" was his insistence that the Incarnation entailed the birth of God, yet that such a birth did not compromise God's impassability. According to Nestorius, if one were to speak of Mary as Theotokos it would imply that the eternal God was born, came to life, and therefore experienced change. Cyril replies, "Since he was born in human nature, he endured what belongs to it without thereby suffering in any respect the slightest harm.... Just as, since He is lord by nature, he remained what He was even when He was born in the form of a servant." This denial of Nestorius' charge is interesting because Cyril is using the term "suffer" in the sense of experiencing harm, i.e., deleterious change. His point is that though Christ was indeed born, he did not suffer from his birth. This is a very curious comment given that earlier in On the Right Faith he uses the term "suffering" to refer to the process of birth. He writes, "For he who in his own nature was in no way poor was poor as a man, and he who is truly rich suffered this quite suitably — that is, the Word from God the Father when he was born like us." This is curious because it means that in the latter passage he says that Christ suffered in as much as he was "born like us" but in the former passage he says that Christ though born as we are did not suffer any harm. Either this is a blatant contradiction or Cyril is simply using the term "suffer" in two different ways. The latter fits with Cyril's sense of kenosis as enduring the limitations of our nature and all the accompanying hardships. The former refers to the consequences of that experience of human hardships. In other words, Christ truly underwent human birth and all that goes with it; but contrary to

27. Commentary on Isaiah 1.4, trans. Russell, pp. 74-75; PG 70, 173B.
29. Ad Reginas De Recta Fide Oratio Altera 38, trans. Greer, p. 30; PG 76, 1388B.
30. Ad Reginas De Recta Fide Oratio Altera 6, trans. Greer, p. 4, PG 76, 1344B.
To say that in the Incarnation Christ had to endure all the vicissitudes of embodiment but was not “the slightest harmed” is a very curious thing to say about someone who underwent the tortures of crucifixion and died. Cyril’s point: though the hypostatic union enabled the Word to experience human suffering, the suffering did not harm the Word in the sense of compromising the unchangeable character of the divine. Cyril employs a number of metaphors to illustrate how the Word in union with the flesh may be said truly to suffer but be unchanged in his divine nature. One image is that of the immortal human soul united to a mortal body. In death the person who is comprised of soul and body suffers and dies. Consequently, the soul is said to experience suffering in the flesh. But even though the soul truly suffers death in the flesh, it does not change in its essential nature. The soul remains immortal. So too the Word suffers in his flesh, but is unchanged in his divine nature by the suffering. This affirmation of Christ’s immutability is the most basic sense of pathoi apathos.

Apathos carries not only the qualification that Christ did not undergo any change of character or power as a result of his experience of suffering, but also the sense that Christ’s suffering is not forced upon him by external forces to which he had to yield. In other words, that which is passible not only changes, but is subject to change imposed on it externally. Were Christ passible in this sense, as we are, it would mean that in the Incarnation he had emptied himself of the absolute power of his divine nature and thus was not fully God. Cyril wants to qualify the character of Christ’s suffering lest the autonomy of the Godhead be jeopardized. He comments that the Incarnation is a kind of “middle position” in which the Word neither soars to the heavenly heights detaching himself from our limitations nor submits to the complete domination of human weaknesses. He writes, “Not that this self-emptying is sufficient to overwhelm by force, so to speak, him who with the Father is king of the universe, for the only-begotten is never forced against his will. Rather it was of his own accord, out of his love for us, that he accepted the self-emptying and persevered with it.” Cyril is following the Johannine theme that Christ did not have his life taken from him, but laid it down voluntarily. Thus Christ’s experience of suffering from birth to the tomb is not imposed on him, but is something he

---

32. *Scholia on the Incarnation of the Only Begotten*, PG 75, 1405A-B.
33. I am grateful to Dr. Phillip Cary for this helpful insight.
34. *Commentary on John* 11.9, trans. Russell, p. 125; Pusey II, 970A.

J. Warren Smith
allows to happen. For Cyril, the voluntary nature of Christ's suffering transformed the cross from a moment of supreme tragedy to one of glory. He interprets the comment in John 7.39 that “Jesus was not yet glorified” to refer to his crucifixion. Similarly, when Jesus prays to the Father, “Glorify your son,” he is, according to Cyril, in effect asking “Allow me to suffer in a voluntary fashion.”35 Because Christ “...accepted suffering voluntarily for our sakes when it was in his power to avoid it, this acceptance of suffering for the good of others is a sign of extraordinary compassion and the highest glory.”36 Christ suffers impossibly in that his suffering is the consequence neither of any weakness nor of any external necessity, but solely within the parameters of the strength of his divine power and out of the compassion of his divine mercy.

Most important for Cyril, Christ’s immutability was manifest in his preservation of his unimpeachable devotion to the Father’s will. He endured both physical abuse as well as degrading insults from the very ones he came to liberate. Yet in spite of such demeaning treatment, Christ’s benevolence toward humanity remained unchanged. In his Isaiah commentary, Cyril explains that the prophet’s words, “Before the child knows good and evil, he will reject evil and choose the good,” bear witness to the goodness proper to Christ’s divine nature which directs his actions even before, in his humanity, he understands the difference between good and evil. Jesus’ intuitive grasp of the good can be attributed only to his divinity; for the divine nature “is ever inaccessible to wickedness. And it repudiates the ways of viciousness, for it is not put to the test from that quarter, nor does it experience any annoyance, for it rejects wickedness by virtue of its nature....”37 This is a crucial passage. For here Cyril asserts not only that Christ was good by nature, but that this goodness was an immutable goodness. Thus he could not even be tempted to viciousness. When Cyril says that Christ’s natural goodness does not allow him to “experience any annoyance” he is suggesting that amid all the insults and abuse which he received from the high priest and the Roman procurator, still Christ was not tempted to return evil with evil; rather Christ was “irrevocably fixed on the good.”38

Perhaps the most vivid illustration of Christ’s suffering the passions of human nature and yet remaining fixed with respect to the good is found in Cyril’s account of Jesus’ experience in the Garden of Gethsemane. Here Cyril sees Christ’s two natures existing side by side in tension and in conflict about the ordeal which awaits. In his prayer, Jesus speaks out of the impulses of both natures. Yet every time his humanity recoils from its duty, it is checked by his immutable divinity which will not deviate from the determined course. Commenting on Jesus’ request to

35. Commentary on John 8; Pusey II, 706A.
36. Commentary on John 8, trans. Russell, p. 121; Pusey II, 705D-E.
37. Commentary on Isaiah 1.4; PG 70, 205B.

Perhaps the most vivid illustration of Christ’s suffering the passions of human nature and yet remaining fixed with respect to the good is found in Cyril’s account of Jesus’ experience in the Garden of Gethsemane.
Cyril goes on to say that, though Jesus experiences the full range of emotions that all mortals feel, he was not disturbed by them to the degree that we are.

Cyril insists, however, that in the hypostatic union Christ is one person; and though in his humanity Christ is inclined to avoid death, his final human choice is perfectly in accord with the divine will.

have this cup taken from him, Cyril observes that the Word who is immortal, incorruptible, and life itself cannot “cower before death.” Yet by virtue of the hypostatic union he experiences all things proper to the flesh, including its revulsion at the threat of death. Thus in his humanity Jesus cowers before death. It is perfectly natural for Jesus as a human being to experience fear of death even as he would hunger or weariness or any other physiological disturbance. Yet, Cyril goes on to say that, though Jesus experiences the full range of emotions that all mortals feel, he was not disturbed by them to the degree that we are.

The implied difference is that in the case of most people, once the emotion is aroused, it seizes control over the soul. In the case of Christ, however, he masters the emotion and “immediately reverts to the courageous attitude that is appropriate to him.”

Commenting on Jesus’ words, “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak,” Cyril says the weakness of the flesh aroused a fear in him that “fell very short of the dignity appropriate to God,” but then adds “That is why he added a most spirited defense to what he had just said, declaring that the flesh is weak because of what is proper to it, and belongs to it by nature, whereas the spirit, by contrast, is willing because it knows that it can suffer nothing that can harm it.”

In addition to declaring that the strength of the divine will reigns in Christ’s human instincts for self-preservation, Cyril implies that Jesus controlled the impulses of his baser appetites by the power of thymos, that is, the spirited faculty of the soul. But he goes on to explain how the divine will places a check on the impulses of his human nature; it was through the recognition that though he will suffer, he will suffer nothing that can harm him. Christ is able to prevail over his passion because of the strength of his spirit which recognizes its ultimate invulnerability to death. Not only is Christ’s courage rallied with the thought that death will not ultimately hurt him, but more importantly he is committed to fulfilling the redemptive purpose of his Incarnation.

Cyril is quick to explain that Jesus’ apprehension in the face of his imminent passion is wholly natural for human nature and so is not a sin. Nor does the presence of timidity imply for Cyril that Jesus possesses two wills which are in conflict. Jesus’ prayer in the garden, “Take this cup from me ... nevertheless not my will but thine be done,” is problematic; for it could be read to imply that, while the Father’s will was that Jesus should die, Jesus’ own will was inclined to evade death. Thus he asks the Father to deliver him from the cross. Cyril insists, however, that in the hypostatic union Christ is one person; and though in his humanity Christ is inclined to avoid death, his final human choice is perfectly in accord with the divine will. Cyril writes, “Christ, how-

38. Commentary on Isaiah 1:4; PG 70, 205C.
39. Commentary on John 8, trans. Russell, p. 120; Pusey II, 704B.
40. Commentary on John 4:1, trans. Russell, p. 113; Pusey I, 332B-C.
41. Commentary on John 8; Pusey II, 703E.
ever, despising death and the shame that comes from suffering, focused only on the achievements resulting from suffering ... the death of all departing from our midst.”

In fact, Jesus’ wish to be freed from his passion conflicted with his will that was set upon the liberation of humanity from death. The conflict was merely about the means necessary to achieve this end. He was willing to bear the dishonor, the insults and tortures “at the hands of the Jews;” yet “if it had been possible for him to achieve what he earnestly desired for us without suffering, he would not have wished to suffer.” It is the divine will that the human race be freed from death, which overrode Christ’s human instinct for self-preservation.

Christ’s mastery of the passions did not entail simply the suppression of the emotion, but its transformation into a virtue. One passage in the Gospel where this motif is played out, according to Cyril, is John 12:27. Jesus upon his final entry into Jerusalem confesses to the disciples, “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say, ‘Father save me from this hour’? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour.” Here Jesus’ words are not at all shocking to Cyril, but they express the very ambivalence of a man possessed of both a vulnerable and frightened human nature and at the same time the divine nature ever committed to fulfilling the purposes of the economy. Cyril observes,

> Notice here again how easy it is to produce confusion and fear in human nature, whereas by contrast the divine and ineffable power is in all respects indestructible and invulnerable and oriented only towards the courage that befits it. For the thought of death that has slipped in attempts to agitate Jesus, while the power of the divinity at once masters the emotion that has been aroused and immediately transforms that which has been conquered by fear into an incomparable courage.

This passage will become significant for Cyril in his later dispute with Nestorius, for it illustrates for Cyril how Christ is human and divine, simultaneously experiencing the drives and impulses of both natures. Unlike Nestorius’ schizophrenic Jesus, Cyril’s Christ of the hypostatic union does not speak at times out of his humanity and then in other passages be possessed by the Word who speaks the divine message. Cyril says of John’s presentation of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, he “el-

---

42. *Commentary on John 8*, trans. Russell, pp. 120-21; Pusey II, 705B.
43. *Commentary on John 4.1*, trans. Russell, p. 112; Pusey I, 331B.
44. *Commentary on John 8*, trans. Russell, p. 120; Pusey II, 703D.
45. “[W]e see him who is by nature truly both God and man speaking as such at one and the same time, brilliantly combining the humble element of the humanity with the glory of the ineffable divine nature, and maintaining a proportionality of expression...” *Commentary on John 11.19*, trans. Russell, p. 126; Pusey II, 970C-D.
46. This is Cyril’s characterization of Nestorius’ position. “And he has the Word of God dwelling in Christ by participation as in an ordinary man, and he divides up the sayings in the Gospels assigning them sometimes exclusively to the Word alone and sometimes exclusively to the man born from a woman,” *Against Nestorius II Proem*, trans. Russell, p. 142; ACO I,1,6,33.
The Word's transformation of Christ's passion of fear into virtue is significant soteriologically; for here we see the sanctifying power of the Word upon the man Jesus. Cyril asserts that Jesus, far from withering under temptation, actually became stronger as a result of his wrestlings with Satan in the wilderness and then the cross.

Elegantly preserved for us in every way Jesus' dual character so that we see him who is by nature truly both God and man speaking as such at one and the same time, brilliantly combining the humble element of the humanity with the glory of the ineffable divine nature, and maintaining a proportionality of expression..."  

The point for Cyril here is that Christ is a single person who feels the emotional pull of his human desire to flee death. Thus in this single person the Word experiences this impulse. Yet Christ whose will is decisively set by his divine nature checks his fear. For Cyril, Jesus' words, "No, for this purpose I have come to this hour," reflect the divine will forcefully reigning in the timidity of his human nature. Moreover Christ controls his fear by stirring within himself a new emotion, resolute courage which transforms Jesus' emotional state by displacing his fear altogether with a virtuous emotion.

The Word's transformation of Christ's passion of fear into virtue is significant soteriologically; for here we see the sanctifying power of the Word upon the man Jesus. Christ suffers impassibly both in the sense that the divinity of the Word is unchanged by the suffering, but also in the sense that though he suffers the emotions of fear and dread he is not swept away by the passions. He suffers impassibly precisely because his adherence to the Father's will is not changed by the passionate impulses of his flesh. Thus Christ's impassible suffering is not a capacity of the divine nature alone, but also of divinized humanity. This is why in the first passage we examined from On the Right Faith Cyril's suggestion that Christ suffered human things impassibly is immediately followed by the comment, "Thus, these events became an example for us in a human fashion, as I said to begin with, so that we might follow in his footsteps."  

Christ's impassible suffering serves as an archetype revealing the character and power of human nature sanctified by the indwelling of Christ's Spirit and thereby giving an example for those who would take up his cross for themselves.  

IMPASSIBLE SUFFERING: An Example of Sanctification

One of the central themes of On the Right Faith is that Christ's suffering gives his disciples an example of impassible suffering, thereby enabling them to master their own passions in moments of temptation. The key text for Cyril is Hebrews 2.18, "For because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted." Commenting on this verse, Cyril asserts that Jesus, far from withering under temptation, actually became stronger as a result of his wrestlings with Satan in the wilderness and then the cross. The strength which

47. Commentary on John 11.9, trans. Russell, p. 126; Pusey II, 970CD.  
48. Ad Reginas De Recta Fide Oratio Altera 163, trans. Greer p. 33; PG 76, 1393B.
Christ gained as a result of his temptation and suffering served a clear purpose for Cyril, “so that through his own flesh he might help those who are weary in their temptations.”

He carries the argument of Hebrews to its full conclusion, namely, that Christ was perfected as a result of his sufferings. This claim illustrates the degree to which Cyril is forced to defend the fully integrative character of the hypostatic union. Cyril takes issue with Nestorius’ interpretation of Hebrews 2:10 which held that Hebrews speaks of the man born of woman being perfected and not the Word who assumes the man. The Word cannot be distinguished from the man, Cyril asserts; therefore, the pioneer of our salvation who is perfected through sufferings is “the Son made man.” To this he adds the explanation, “For ‘he endured the cross, despising the shame’ entirely by the good pleasure of God the Father so that he might make us bold, taken by the hand to follow in his steps...”

The whole person of Jesus Christ is perfected, not just his humanity. The divine Son is perfected in that he fulfills that purpose of the Incarnation, sanctifying humanity that we might follow in his perfection. Such perfection means imitating his manner of suffering, i.e., an impassible suffering at the hands of persecutors. In his circumstances, Cyril equated the persecutors with the enemies of christological orthodoxy. Christ’s suffering emboldens his followers for their day of persecution. He writes, “Since they [i.e., Christ’s disciples] were going to have affliction in the world and be persecuted by their enemies ... and since they were going to establish virtue well and truly by sweat and toil, he does not allow them to be unmanned by cowardice, but makes them fully courageous, since he himself ran his course through suffering.”

Cyril is clear here that Christ does not simply give his disciples an example so that they may see the good in order to do the good. Rather his example of enduring suffering impassibly creates in their souls the necessary virtue, that is courage, in order to endure their own persecutions and sufferings for the faith. This boldness enables them to imitate the unflinching faithfulness to the good which is the character of Christ’s impassible suffering.

Christ’s example provides his followers with courage and inspires their imitation because it reveals to them the glory which is the end of their suffering. Commenting on I Peter 2.20-1, Cyril tells Pulcheria and Eudocia that the Lord’s suffering had two objectives. The first aim was to show them “how they ought to approach the assaults of temptation” and the demeanor they should show towards those who persecute his followers. Once again he reiterates the theme of Christ as our example. But immediately Cyril declares emphatically, “Still more than this, his purpose is to show how honorable the end of the obedience is, so that we may be found excellent and wise imitators of what was done by

49. *Ad Reginas De Recta Fide Oratio Altera* 11, trans. Greer, p. 8; *PG* 76, 1349A-

50. *Ad Reginas De Recta Fide Oratio Altera* 30, trans. Greer, p. 22; *PG* 76, 1373C-D.

51. *Ad Reginas De Recta Fide Oratio Altera* 30, trans. Greer, p. 22; *PG* 76, 1373D.

The whole person of Jesus Christ is perfected, not just his humanity. The divine Son is perfected in that he fulfills that purpose of the Incarnation, sanctifying humanity that we might follow in his perfection. Christ’s example provides his followers with courage and inspires their imitation because it reveals to them the glory which is the end of their suffering.
Christ's impassible suffering is able to serve as an example for his disciples to imitate because it is an example of the new and sanctified humanity produced by the hypostatic union. Christ's impassible suffering is able to serve as an example for his disciples to imitate because it is an example of the new and sanctified humanity produced by the hypostatic union.

As creatures sharing Christ's humanity, his followers will naturally enough experience suffering and all the accompanying passions. Yet, as people possessing the image of the man from heaven, they are not to be subject to the passions' dominion, even as Christ himself was not.

This transformation of human nature is nothing short of moral divinization. Cyril writes, "the human qualities were active in Christ in a profitable way, not that having been set in motion they should prevail and develop further, as is the case with us, but that having been set in motion they should be brought up short by the power of the Word, nature having first been transformed in Christ into a better and more divine state. For it was in this way and in no other that the mode of healing passed over into ourselves too." Here "the mode of healing" refers to Christ's suffering, but not to his suffering exclusively on the cross. In this context, the mode of healing refers to his victory over the passions of fear and timidity which were stirred within him as he

52. Ad Reginas De Recta Fide Oratio Altera 39, trans. Greer, p. 31; PG 76,1389A-B.
53. This is certainly the sense of the passage when read in the context of the other passages in which Cyril speaks of Christ's suffering, giving his followers courage. Moreover, it is a motif present in the most famous martyrdom literature (see Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to the Romans 7.2-3; The Martyrdom of Polycarp 2.3-4; Origen, Exhortation to Martyrdom I.5 and II.15).
55. Commentary on John 8, trans. Russell, p. 120; Pusey II, 703E-704a.
prayed in Gethsemane. Though he suffers the passions proper to human weakness, he suffered them impassibly in the sense that he did not yield to the impulse of fear. They did not “prevail and develop further, as in the case with us,” meaning that they did not cause him to retreat from death as we might be tempted. Instead, the passions were “brought up short” and his humanity was transformed into “a better and more divine state.” That is to say, our human nature which is inclined to succumb to the passions was sanctified or divinized, meaning that human nature comes to share in God’s impassability. In his Commentary on Isaiah, Cyril explains that the phrase “rod of Jesse” is suggestive of a king’s sceptre and thus symbolic of Christ’s royal power, “it controls all things, and maintains them in well being, and enables what is weak to stand up, that is to say human nature, which is drunk with the passions and all but brought down by them.”

The rectitude produced by the Word extends beyond the single instance of Jesus to include all of Adam’s race. In the hypostatic union our common humanity was made rich in the sense that it was given those powers from the divine nature which give us the capacity for joy and glory as well as freedom from bodily corruption. When the divine was united to a single human being the whole of the human race was raised to his status. This, however, is no vicarious participation or union with God. Rather Cyril says, “Therefore ‘in Christ’ that which is enslaved is liberated in a real sense and ascends to a mystical union with him who put on the form of a servant, while [Christ was] ‘in us’ it is liberated by an imitation of the union with the one through our kinship in the flesh.”

When Cyril speaks of our nature being in a mystical union by “an imitation of the union with the one through our kinship according to the flesh” he is referring to the hypostatic union. In other words, by virtue of the union of human and divine in the Incarnation, the divine is united analogously to all humanity, thereby giving us the same capacity for joy and glory and incorruption which we witness in Jesus. Arguably, the effect of the indwelling of the divine in us is our sanctification, which is accomplished in a dialectic between purgation and illumination. Describing the effects of Christ’s union with us, Cyril writes, “For when Christ has come to be within us he lulls to sleep the law that rages in the members of the flesh. He rekindles our reverence toward God, while simultaneously causing the passions to atrophy.”

As the soul is reoriented toward God in due reverence, the passions cease to have a hold upon us. We gain control over our warring members, i.e., the impulses of our animal nature. Indeed this mastery over the passions is precisely the effect we see of the Word’s union with passable human flesh in the Incarnation.

---

56. Commentary on Isaiah 2.4, trans. Russell, p. 81; PG 70, 312A.
57. Commentary on John 1.9, trans. Russell, p. 107; Pusey I, 96e.
Although the indwelling of the Spirit in Christ's followers is not identical with the hypostatic union, Cyril here uses the same metaphor he employs to speak of the indwelling Word of Christ to describe the relation of the believer to the Spirit. Christ's mastery over the passions of the flesh during his passion — a mastery achieved by the sanctifying power of the Word's divine nature — is paradigmatic for the sanctifying work of the Spirit dwelling in Christ's followers. For Christ sanctifies his disciples through the gift of his Spirit through whom God acts immediately in the lives of his creatures. In the Fall humanity subjected its minds to the passions of the flesh such that the Spirit who rested upon Adam and Eve in the beginning could no longer dwell in them. With the union of the divine to all of humanity in Christ the new Adam, Cyril says, the Spirit may once again rest upon those who are a new creation in Christ. Since the Spirit is consubstantial with the Father and the Son, those in whom the Spirit dwells are partakers of the divine nature and so "born of God." Thus in his Commentary on John, Cyril says that we are temples of God whose Spirit dwells within us. Although the indwelling of the Spirit in Christ's followers is not identical with the hypostatic union, Cyril here uses the same metaphor he employs to speak of the indwelling Word of Christ to describe the relation of the believer to the Spirit. Even as in the Incarnation the human and the divine natures remained conceptually distinct though united, so too the Spirit does not change our creaturely nature into divinity. But the Spirit illuminates the souls of the saints with the divine beauty and imprints the spiritual likeness of the Son upon us, transforming us into that which belongs to Christ.

59. "Truly God the Father's glory is to do away with death through his own Begotten one. Therefore, his perfection through suffering supplies us with what is lacking from our birth. For what is in Christ is a new creation.... Thus the Son sanctifies, since he is God by nature. And we are sanctified by him through the Spirit." Ad Reginas De Recta Fide Oratio Altera 32, trans. Greer, p. 23; PG 76, 1376D.

60. Brian Daley, in his forthcoming essay, "The Fullness of the Saving God: Cyril of Alexandria on the Holy Spirit," observes, "...the distinctive role of the Spirit is to be even more intimately present in the experience of the creatures God calls to salvation than is the Father or the Son: to be precisely the point of contact between God and the creature, the active means by which the whole Trinity dwells in us."

61. Ad Reginas De Recta Fide Oratio Altera 9, trans. Greer, p. 6; PG 76, 1345D.

62. Cyril explains that human beings as creatures do not possess incorruptibility and immortality by nature and therefore have to be equipped with such capacities surpassing our own nature by being sealed with "the spirit of life." But with the fall, humanity was "striped of the grace. The breath of life, that is, the Spirit who says, 'I am the Life' departed from the earthly flesh and the living being succumbed to death through the flesh alone, since the soul is preserved in its immortality...." Commentary on John 1.9, trans. Russell, p. 104; Pusey I, 94E-95A.

63. Commentary on Isaiah 2.4; PG 70, 313C. Wilken, p. 107, suggests that Cyril's most significant contribution to the development of the Adam-Christ typology is that he links it to the new creation.

64. "We are called gods [cf. Ps. 82.6], not simply by grace because we are winging our way towards the glory that transcends us, but because we already have God dwelling and abiding in us...." Commentary on John 1.9, trans. Russell, p. 103; Pusey I, 93C-E.

65. Five Fomes Against Nestorius III.2; ACO L1, 6, 60.
in suffering the weaknesses and passions of our human nature he did not deviate from his unshakable adherence to the good; in a similar way, Cyril insists, Christ's Spirit empowers Christians for the impassible endurance of temptation and suffering. This point Cyril illustrates in his discussion of the anointing of Christ by the Holy Spirit at his baptism.

Christ's baptism and his subsequent battle with Satan were, according to Cyril, the necessary triumph of Jesus as the new Adam for the redemption of the human race. Christ, he says, restored to humanity "robust spiritual health," eliminating the bodily and spiritual ailments which we suffered since Adam's fall. This healing was accomplished because in Christ's kenosis he took on our nature which is vulnerable to the temptation of Satan, but his human nature empowered by the immutable sanctity of his divine nature did not succumb to temptation, thereby repelling Satan's assault. But Cyril goes on to make the point that Christ's entry into temptation in the wilderness and ultimate victory over Satan came only after his baptism when he was anointed by the Holy Spirit. This could be a problem for Cyril in that it might suggest that Christ's triumph through his sanctified humanity was the work of the Spirit who empowered Jesus' humanity and not of the Word to whom His humanity was hypostatically united. Luke's comment that Jesus was "led" by the Holy Spirit does not mean, Cyril argues, that he was "taken off" against his will. Rather he was "led" in the same sense that a good citizen leads himself blamelessly. In Christ's temptation in the wilderness, Cyril says, we see both his divine and human natures. In his humanity, he hungered as a result of his fasting. Yet "by power suitable to God [he] had kept the flesh uncorrupted apart from drink and food, he barely admits what is proper to it to suffer." Here again we hear Cyril speak of suffering in a sense other than the physical pain of the cross, but without experiencing the change one might expect in someone who had refrained from eating or drinking for an extended time. The divine power from the Holy Spirit strengthens his body beyond its natural capacity, preserving it from such change. Cyril goes on to call Pulcheria and Eudocia's attention to the key detail that Christ was not tempted in the wilderness prior to his baptism and the descent of the Holy Spirit. The reason for this timing was, not that the power of the Word needed to be augmented by power from the Spirit, but to give us an example of what is necessary in order to face temptation and possible martyrdom. In the power natural to human nature, Christ's followers are not strong enough "to endure manfully" Satan's assaults.

66. "Therefore, he enters the battle for us as man and he conquers in a divine fashion. He is tempted, since Satan assaulted him as one like us and thought that the weakness of the flesh would join battle with him against the one who was tempted. But Satan withdrew, defeated by the nature of man which was renewed in Christ...." Ad Reginas De Recta Fide Oratio Altera 36, trans. Greer, p. 27; PG 76, 1384A.

67. Ad Reginas De Recta Fide Oratio Altera 36, trans. Greer, pp. 27-28; PG 76, 1384A.
By the indwelling of the Spirit the disciple does not yield to the temptations, but stands as Christ resolutely faithful to the good and defiant of Satan. Through the Holy Spirit Christ’s followers are empowered for the same resistance to evil as Christ Jesus. The weakness of Christ’s flesh in the face of death serves as an example to us of our own vulnerability and impotence to fulfill God’s will if we try to act within the reaches of our natural powers. It is only after baptism that the believer, “strengthened by sharing in the Holy Spirit and sealed by the grace from on high for robust health, namely spiritual health, ...shall be unassailable by Satan and ... shall be preserved in life as by the power of the Spirit....”68 Here Cyril almost verbatim repeats his earlier description of Christ’s giving to his human nature and ours strength and health as a result of his victory over Satan. Moreover, his description of the Christ’s disciples as becoming unassailable by Satan, does not imply that we are immune to temptations or that we do not feel the impulses of our animal nature. Rather by the indwelling of the Spirit the disciple does not yield to the temptations, but stands as Christ did, resolutely faithful to the good and defiant of Satan. Through the Holy Spirit Christ’s followers are empowered for the same resistance to evil as Christ Jesus. Moreover, because the Holy Spirit came upon Christ empowering him for his struggle with temptation, his followers see in Christ’s resistance to temptation through the power of the Spirit the effects of the very power now at work in them through the presence of the same Spirit. Christ’s plea in Matthew 26, “Let this cup pass from me,” Cyril says, illustrates the weakness of human nature unaided by the Holy Spirit when confronted with imminent suffering. “Do you see how weak human nature is, even in Christ himself, when it relies on its own power?” he asks. But immediately Cyril proceeds to explain that in the hypostatic union Christ’s disciples are shown how the divine empowers us to adhere to the divine will, Through the Word that is united with it [i.e., the human nature], the flesh is brought back to a courage befitting God and is retrained in order to have a more valiant spirit, so as not to rely upon what seems right to its own will, but rather to follow the aim of the divine will and eagerly to run towards whatever the Law of the Creator calls us.69

The weakness of Christ’s flesh in the face of death serves as an example to us of our own vulnerability and impotence to fulfill God’s will if we try to act within the reaches of our natural powers. At the same time, it demonstrates the degree to which our humanity, as Christ’s, can be strengthened for the purpose of fulfilling even God’s most demanding callings. Thus the presence of the Spirit in Christ after his baptism gives to his disciples hope of receiving the same power from the Spirit and so achieving victory over temptation and timidity. Cyril concludes this discussion with the remark, “For just as through his resurrection from the dead we have become stronger than corruption, so through his victory in temptation we have again received power.”70

This is the soteriological context in which we must read Cyril’s comment that Christ’s impassible suffering serves as an example for his

---

68. Ad Reginas De Recta Fide Oratio Altera 36, trans. Greer, p. 28; PG 76, 1384D.
69. Commentary on John 4.1, trans. Russell, p. 113; Pusey I, 332A.
70. Ad Reginas De Recta Fide Oratio Altera 36, trans. Greer, p. 28; PG 76, 1384D.
followers. The Christ of the hypostatic union reveals a new humanity—a divinized humanity—summed up in the new Adam. Thus our nature possesses capacities not found in “the old man.” Such capacities become actualized through the indwelling of Christ’s Holy Spirit whom Christians receive at baptism. The empowering Spirit does not free the disciple from suffering; rather the Spirit enables her to remain unmoved with respect to the good even in the midst of suffering. This graceful and faithful endurance of suffering is the essence of Christ’s impassible suffering in which his disciples can now share.

To conclude: Impassible suffering is significant for Cyril’s explanation of the “great exchange” of the Incarnation between the immutable Word and our impoverished humanity. *Pathoi apathos* affirms that the Word took upon himself the suffering proper to weak humanity but without being corrupted by it. At the same time, it signifies that our humanity, ever prone to the temptations of the passions, received the moral rectitude of divine holiness as well as the divine incorruptibility which frees us from death. Cyril’s phrase “impassible suffering” is a paradox—but a paradox in the Kierkegaardian sense: “paradox is the passion of thought and the thinker without the paradox is like the lover without passion”71 Impassible suffering is a paradox that arouses the curiosity of the intellect and drives it to explore the salvific work of the Incarnation. □

---
