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Notes

- 1 J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, "What Makes Us Human? The Interdisciplinary Challenge to Theological Anthropology and Christology," *Toronto Journal of Theology*, 26 no. 2 (2010): 143–160.
- 2 *Philosophical Investigations*, 2nd ed., trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1958), 32.
- 3 In rabbinic theology, everything is either God-made (*bi-yedei shamayim*) or man-made (*bi-yedei adam*). See Mishnah: *Kelim* 9:8; *Ohal.* 3:7; *Neg.* 11:3; Babylonian Talmud: *Ber.* 33b re Deut 10:12.
- 4 Thus humans, not God, name their fellow earthly creatures (*Gen.* 2:19–20). Though, in rabbinic theology, Scripture (the Written Torah) is created by God, the process of Scripture's ongoing interpretation and application is a human construct according to Maimonides (*Mishneh Torah*: *Rebels* 1:1–3), what philosophers today would call "public reason," as distinct from private, individual speculation.
- 5 See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, 1.65.
- 6 For an argument against natural theology, see David Novak, *In Defense of Religious Liberty* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2009), 33–46.
- 7 See *ibid.*, 1.69.
- 8 See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B3–5.
- 9 See Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. B. E. Galli (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 105.
- 10 See *Josh.* 23:14; 1 Kings 2:2; Babylonian Talmud: *Abod. Zar.* 54b. Even though the Torah commands the Jews to celebrate the great miracles they have experienced (see, e.g., *Exod.* 13:8–10), the rabbis point out that they are not to assume such miracles will be performed on their behalf, hence the Jews are to conduct their affairs according to the customary order of the world of their ordinary experience. See Babylonian Talmud: *Qidd.* 39b re 1 Sam 16:2.
- 11 See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B659–670.
- 12 See his *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, trans. J. Oman (New York: Harper and Row, 1958).
- 13 See David Novak, "Are Philosophical Proofs of the Existence of God Theologically Meaningful?," in *Talking with Christians*, 247–259 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005).
- 14 In the Creation narrative in *Gen.* 1–3, only humans are the addressees of God's speech to them (*Gen.* 2:16; 3:8). Hence they know about the event of Creation only what God has revealed to them, since only God was there to experience it.
- 15 See *Mishneh Torah: Foundations*, 1:8–9.
- 16 See David Novak, *The Election of Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 121n36.
- 17 *Commentary on the Torah*: *Gen.* 1:26, quoted and discussed in David Novak, *The Theology of Maimonides Systematically Presented* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1992), 25–26.
- 18 See Tosefta: *Sanhedrin* 8:8; Babylonian Talmud: *Sanhedrin* 38a.
- 19 See Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 2nd ed. (London: Pimlico, 1983).
- 20 Wentzel van Huyssteen, "Human Origins and Religious Awareness: In Search of Human Uniqueness," *The Global Spiral*, <http://www.metanexus.net/magazine/tabid/68/id/9929/Default.aspx>.
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 Mishnah: *Abot* 3:18 re *Gen.* 9:6.
- 23 See Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, trans. R.F. Brown, P.C. Hodgson, and J.M. Stewart (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 371–374.

ARTICLE

Deep Incarnation: Why Evolutionary Continuity Matters in Christology

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Abstract: This article presents the idea of deep incarnation in outline. In dialogue with Wentzel van Huyssteen's interpretation of *imago Dei* and Christology on the one hand and with Arne Næss's notion of deep ecology on the other hand, it is claimed that evolutionary continuity is as important for Christology as is the evolutionary distinctiveness of the human species. Without a strong continuity between the historical figure of Jesus and the cosmos at large, we end up in a culturally confined Christology. But without referring to the unique human identity of Jesus Christ, we would speak of a Logos principle thinly spread over the universe rather than of Jesus Christ as the living divine bond in and between everything that exists. Incarnation is "deep" both in contradistinction to a purely anthropocentric Christology and as opposed to more shallow proposals of a universalist Christology.

Keywords: Arne Næss, deep ecology, incarnation, Logos, Stoicism

Introduction: Context

Over the last decade Wentzel van Huyssteen has engaged himself in a sustained interdisciplinary dialogue with paleoanthropologists, charting a new territory for scholars in the field of science and religion. This new territory has proven immensely attractive insofar as it concerns some defining characteristics of what makes us human, including issues such as imagination, symbolic language, cognition, morality, art, and religion. As shown by van Huyssteen, the emergence of humanity is difficult to address from a purely empirical perspective, since most of the distinctively human features are attested only indirectly in the prehistoric records, with cave art and burial practices as notable exceptions. Inevitably philosophical assumptions of a more general nature will be part of the formation of scientific hypotheses on human prehistory. In his Gifford Lectures, *Alone in the World?*, van Huyssteen has thus brought important philosophical arguments as well as

theological perspectives into his dialogue with paleoanthropology. In this context he also offers a convincing picture of the view of humanity as created in the image and likeness of God.¹

In his lead article in the present volume van Huyssteen² goes one step further by including Christology in his reflections. Indeed, the relation between the concept of *imago Dei* and Christology has been essential to Christian understandings of human uniqueness. In the New Testament only Jesus Christ is designated as the *imago Dei*, as “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” (Col 1:15). In the Hebrew Bible, by contrast, human beings in general are seen as created in the image and likeness of God. But also here the term is rare, occurring only three times, though in all cases in prominent contexts, first in the creation account (Gen 1:26–28), then in the context of the generational family tree in Genesis 5:1–2 (suggesting a connection between *imago Dei* and the blessing of human sexuality and offspring), and finally in the context of the taboo against killing other human beings (Gen 9:6). It thus seems that in the biblical tradition the *imago Dei* not only entails having specifically unique human capacities but *using* them in a particular manner, that is, in a somehow god-like mindset and exercised in patterns of conduct similar to that of God (see Phil 2:5–11). These “ethical” aspects are, as rightly emphasized by van Huyssteen, inseparable from the “religious” aspects of the *imago Dei*, since they are relational aspects of an *imago Dei* facilitated by contextually sensitive human beings.

This essay will focus on Christology, more precisely on the scope of Christology. My aim is thus to present the idea of “deep incarnation” in condensed form and at the same time relate this notion to Arne Næss’s concept of deep ecology and to van Huyssteen’s views on anthropology and Christology. I thus speak of deep incarnation in a programmatic contrast to more anthropocentric concepts of incarnation. As a matter of fact, the New Testament nowhere states that God became human. Rather the Logos of God “became flesh” (John 1:14a). My point will thus be that also a “high” Christology, which presupposes the full presence of the divine Logos in Jesus, will need to acknowledge that God’s incarnation also reaches into the depths of material existence. Otherwise Jesus could not really “dwell amongst us” (John 1:14b) but his life would be somehow abstracted from the creaturely nexus in which he came into being. In this view, evolutionary continuity is as important for Christology as are the discontinuities provided by human uniqueness.

The Prologue to the Gospel of John is the key text for this essay. However, I will also point to other biblical traditions in which God’s presence in Christ is emphasized as the living bond in and between all that exists, whether material or spiritual. As it is said in the Pauline tradition about Jesus Christ, “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross” (Col 1:19–20). The

dwelling of God in Christ is here seen as implying a soteriological vision that is anything but particularistic. The fullness of God that was pleased to dwell in the creaturely existence of Jesus was also pleased to bring “all things” into reconciliation, and likewise in Hebrews 2, where the high view of humanity, as expressed in Psalms 8:5–6, is applied to Jesus as the pioneer of salvation. Also here the lowliness of Jesus as being made “perfect through sufferings” (Heb 2:10) is essential, for, as the text continues, since “the children [of God] share flesh and blood, he [Jesus] himself likewise shares flesh and blood” (Heb 2:14). “High” and “low” persistently penetrate one another.

It goes without saying that the specific features of human uniqueness, such as consciousness and the awareness of God, are likewise essential to Christology, as shown by van Huyssteen. But deep incarnation suggests that the incarnation of God’s Word in Jesus Christ assumed the full gamut of material and biological existence through the specific humanity of Jesus. In his article, van Huyssteen follows Kevin Hector’s argument that Schleiermacher’s Christology was not at all a “low” Christology, which argues in a bottom-up way from Jesus’s specific awareness of God to his status as the son of God. Rather Schleiermacher’s Christology is “high” insofar as God is claimed to be fully present in the God-consciousness of Jesus.³ Nonetheless I would still argue that Schleiermacher models the idea of incarnation (God’s coming into flesh) on the idea of divine revelation (God’s coming into awareness). However, the former cannot be reduced to the latter, if the scope of Christology is more inclusive than human consciousness and its affectations.

The emphasis of deep incarnation constitutes an attempt to counteract the Kantian move in a theology of Schleiermacher’s kind. What Immanuel Kant believed was given a priori with the cognitive apparatus of humanity has, in a contemporary perspective informed by evolutionary cognitive science, turned out to be derived from well-winnowed a posteriori inference mechanisms. Moreover, since Schleiermacher developed his Christology on the unique presence of God in Jesus’s awareness of God, he focused on the consciousness of Jesus while assuming that the bodily derived affectations of Jesus are fully subordinate to his higher human faculties. In the end, biology (and the evolutionary continuity of humans with animals) was for Schleiermacher the basis of sin, not of salvation—quite the contrary from the perspective of deep incarnation. In this view God’s eternal Logos not only embraces the uniqueness of humanity, but also the continuity of humanity with other animals, and with the material world at large. Christology is here as much about the bodiliness of Christ as about his consciousness, as much about the biology of growth, vulnerability, and decay as about the heights of religious awareness, and as much about the world of creation as about Jesus as a human individual.

At this point I have two questions to Wentzel van Huyssteen, and I’m eager to hear his answers. The first is to what extent he would see the con-

Christology as the undeniable uniqueness of humanity. The second is whether he would find the idea of deep incarnation helpful as a friendly amendment to his own Christological reflections, or whether he would see the notion of deep incarnation as destructive for formulating a more modest Christology in continuation of Schleiermacher.

The Argument in Outline

The aim of this essay is to further develop, and exegetically strengthen, the concept of *deep incarnation* that has earlier been coined in discussions of evolutionary Christology.⁴ My proposal is that the divine Logos (which can be translated as the creative "Word" or the formative "Pattern")⁵ has assumed not merely humanity, but the *whole malleable matrix of materiality*. It is good to see that this notion of deep incarnation has been taken up by several like-minded theologians who are prepared to rethink the Christian tradition in its biological and cosmic scope. The Australian Catholic theologian Denis Edwards has thus extended the idea of deep incarnation into an eco-theology, underlining in particular the creative as well as redeeming presence of Christ in the ecosystem at large.⁶ The Anglican theologian Christopher Southgate has used the idea to formulate an evolutionary theodicy, which does not stay content with a system-oriented view of nature but insists on the creation of a new world in the eschaton.⁷ The biologist-theologian Celia Deane-Drummond has then used the term to express the dramatic aesthetics of evolution, linking the concept of deep incarnation to the particular theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar.⁸ In *Celebrating Christ with Creation: A Theology of Worship for the Season of Creation*, Lutheran theologians Norman Habel, David Rhoads, and Paul Santmire have a chapter, "A Theology of Deep Incarnation and Reconciliation," in which they formulate an argument in response to the climate change as follows: "If we recognise Earth as a living organism, can we also say God became 'incarnate' in Earth? Does Jesus the creature represent all creation? The answer, I believe, is yes! Jesus, as animated dust from the ground, is that piece of Earth where God's presence is concentrated in the incarnation. God becomes flesh, clay, Earth."⁹ The American Catholic feminist Elizabeth A. Johnson points out that a shift is taking place in systematic theology, whereby the concept of deep incarnation is "coming into use to signify this radical, divine reach into the very tissue of biological existence and the wider system of nature."¹⁰

In what follows I will point in particular to the Gospel of John as a witness of the concerns expressed by the term *deep incarnation*. By becoming "flesh" in Jesus, the eternal Logos of God entered into all dimensions of God's world of creation. In Greek, *sarx* primarily denotes the particular bodies (in John 1:14 the blood and body of Jesus), with a special connotation of the frailty and vulnerability that is always attached to being a particular body living in

a particular habitat, always susceptible to growth and decay. In ancient Greek thinking, however, bodies were taken to be part of a whole flux of material beings, thus always in contact with one another. Hence *sarx* also meant all that was composed of the basic elements of earth, water, air, and fire (in the sublunar world).¹¹ It was thus easily used by early Christians to render the Old Testament meaning of "all flesh" (*kol-bashtar*). In modern translation, *sarx* would cover the whole realm of the material world from quarks to atoms and molecules, in their combinations and transformations throughout chemical and biological evolution. Speaking in biblical language, my proposal of deep incarnation suggests that God's Logos was united with Jesus throughout all dimensions of his life story. So the divine Logos became a human being, but by implication also entered a world filled with fields, foxes, and sparrows, conjoined in its destiny even with the growing and withering grass. Indeed, the Logos of God became Earth in Jesus. Jesus was "not of this world" (John 17:14)—the human world of sin—but he certainly was conjoined fully with the material world in which he was "at home" (John 1:11).

Deep Incarnation and Deep Ecology: Common Concerns, Different Solutions

In introducing the idea of deep incarnation I was inspired by the term *deep ecology* coined by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss,¹² and I therefore need to clarify the relation between the two terms. According to Næss, the sciences of ecology should be supplemented by an ecosophy, that is, an experientially based understanding of oneself as a part of a rich natural nexus that far exceeds that of humanity. Thus nature must never be used merely as a means to humans' self-serving utility. This is an extension of the ethical principle outlined by Immanuel Kant, who stated that one must never make use of another person as a mere means but, always and also, regard the others as intrinsically valuable.¹³ Put in theological terms, nature itself should be seen as our neighbour. And since we, as embodied persons, are part and parcel of nature, we also have to be our own neighbours, tending ourselves within our ecological settings.

Moreover, deep ecology is associated with views often designated as biocentrism, or even ecocentrism. The long-term flourishing of living systems is the central concern for an ecosophic ethics, but life cannot flourish without being sustained by the ecosystems as a whole, by mountains, soil, water, weather systems, etc. This ecocentric view is, according to Næss and other deep ecologists, better served by resacralizing nature, as indigenous religions usually do, or by adopting East or South Asian religions such as Daoism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Occidental religions, including Christianity, are criticized for being too deeply steeped in anthropocentrism.

I share with Næss and other deep ecologists the concern about anthropocentrism in central strands of the Occidental traditions, though I believe with most scholars of religion that there are ample biblical resources for understanding humanity in the context of life and nature. At the same time, however, I am skeptical about adopting a purely system-oriented view of nature, as suggested by an ecocentrism that does not allow for distinguishing between different levels of nature. In the first thesis of the *Deep Ecology Platform* of 1974, Næss and colleagues stated that “human and nonhuman life *alike* have intrinsic value.”¹⁴ But this view neglects the dirty biological fact that all life is lived at the expense of other life, and that some “higher” or more complex forms of life should, after all, be given higher value than some “lower” or more general forms of life.¹⁵ I would argue that in practical life we cannot, and should not, avoid making distinctions within nature. We need to combine a systemic view of nature (concerning the wider ecological relations) with a special interest in individual organisms, especially creatures with highly sensitive sensory organs that allow them to develop complex repertoires of awareness and even self-awareness. Among such creatures are we, the humans; but we are not the only sensitive beings on our planet. Thus, even though I have taken my cue from the idea of deep ecology when addressing the themes of deep incarnation, I do not subscribe to the purely systemic view of nature propagated by the deep ecology movement.

The Stoic Background of Logos Christology (John 1:1–13)

System-oriented views of nature were already promoted in antiquity, in particular in Stoicism. The early patristic exegesis of John 1:1 (“In the Beginning was Logos”) shows that Christianity was not from the beginning conceptualized in a Platonic framework, but rather evidences strong undercurrents from Jewish Wisdom traditions (for example, in *The Wisdom of Solomon*), and from Stoic thinking, which happened to be the leading philosophy in the Roman Empire between 100 BCE and 150 CE.¹⁶ Unlike Platonism, Stoic physics was basically materialist but also recognized the informational or “logical” aspects of the material world. New Testament scholarship today mostly agrees that the Gospel of John should be seen as neither a religious text explaining the meaning of the Jesus story in “plain personal” terms (as argued by the liberal theologian, Adolf von Harnack), nor as a reflex of a “Gnostic redeemer myth” (as argued by the existentialist Rudolf Bultmann).¹⁷ A new school of Testament scholars have argued (to me quite convincingly) that Stoic anthropology and physics have influenced not only the ethics but also the cosmology of Paul and John. This opens up new theological possibilities for understanding the way in which the writings of Paul and John presuppose a synthesis of Stoic and Jewish ideas, common to

many of their contemporaries.¹⁸ Hence God and matter are not simply divided into two separate realms, as in Platonism and in so-called Gnosticism, nor is the meaning of the gospel explained in purely anthropological terms, divorced from a cosmological perspective. According to this new perspective early Christian thinking may have more in common with contemporary scientific questions than self-proclaimed “modern” existentialist interpretations of Christianity, which presuppose that both God and humanity are divorced from nature.

The Prologue to the Gospel of John (1:1–14) starts out by placing the significance of the historical figure of Jesus in a cosmic perspective. The divine Logos is seen as the creative and formative principle of the universe “in the beginning” (John 1:1–5), and as the revealer for all humanity since the dawn of humanity (John 1:9). It is this universally active divine Logos that became “flesh” (*sarx*) in the life story of Jesus of Nazareth (1:14).

The divine Logos is said to be “in the beginning” (*en archē*). The Greek term *archē*, like its Latin equivalent *principium*, not only denotes a temporal beginning, but the continuous foundation. The *archē* thus signifies what we today might call ultimate reality: Logos is the (everlasting) Beginning from which all other (temporal) beginnings take place. Logos was therefore also “in God” (*en theōi*). Being “in the Beginning” and being “in God” are correlatives, insofar as God is the generative Matrix of all that was, is, and will be. Logos, however, is not said to be identical with God (later in the gospel designated as “the Father”). Logos is God in the predicative sense of being divine (*theos*), but is not God in the substantive sense (which would have been rendered as *ho theos*, with a definite article).¹⁹ Logos belongs to God, and is God, but although Logos is one with the Father in a mutual relation, a being-in-one-another (14:10; 17:21), Logos and the Father are not flatly identical, since the Father is “greater” than Jesus (17:28).

Now the Greek term *logos* can be translated differently. Even today it is most often translated as “Word” in continuation of the Latin translation *Vulgata* dating from the fourth century. However, writing around 200, the Church Father Tertullian did not even consider this translation. When discussing the meanings of the Greek term *Logos*, he rather pointed out that *Logos* in Latin could be rendered both as *ratio* (rationality) and as *sermo* (speech). Tertullian, though, found it inconceivable that God should be thought of as “speaking” in eternity, before the temporal beginning. Rather in God’s eternity, Logos must denote the divine rationality or mind (*ratio*), which may involve an inner dialogue (*sermo*), but does not express itself outwards until the creation of the world.²⁰

Tertullian is here presupposing a common distinction in Stoic school philosophy between the “inherent logos in God” (*logos endiathetos*) and the “outgoing divine logos” (*logos prophorikos*). Among Greek Church Fathers such as Theophilus of Antioch (writing around 190), this Stoic distinction is explicitly used²¹—again indicating that Stoic distinctions were well known

among Christian writers in the Roman Empire. This Stoic distinction underlined the ontological identity between the inner-divine and the outgoing divine Logos—a most welcome idea to express the meaning of the incarnation of God's Logos for second-century Christian thinkers.

These early interpretations of John testify that Stoicism has been inspirational for early Christianity, also among “orthodox” Church Fathers. As a consequence, there is the strongest possible link between God's “inner” nature and God's “external” creativity. This interpretation finds support in the text itself of the Prologue, for it is about the divine Logos that it is said, “Through this Logos all things came into being, and apart from this nothing came into being” (John 1:3). Logos is here identified as the *divine informational resource*. We may speak of the Logos as the informational Matrix for the concrete forms that have emerged and will emerge in the world of creation. Using the models of divine creativity from Genesis 1, which forms the subtext for John 1, the divine Logos is creative by setting distinctions into the world (carving out “this” and “that”) and by setting informational patterns into motion (combining “this” and “that”).²²

In Stoic thinking there is no gulf between God and world as in the Platonic tradition, for Logos is all-pervasive as the outgoing structuring principle of the universe. Logos expresses itself in the harmonious order of the universe as well as in the rational capacities of human beings. Accordingly the Prologue of John states, “In Logos was Life, and that Life was the light of human beings” (John 1:4). Observe that “human beings” do not here refer to specific religious groups, but any human being born into the world: “The true Light gives light to any human being who is entering into the world” (John 1:9).²³

While seeing the divine Logos as the active principle, and the logical structures of the universe as passive qualities, the Stoics retained a distinction between world and God. They claimed, however, that God was no less material than the physical cosmos, just finer and more fiery and airy. God was identified with the “active fire” (*pur technikon*) that moves and rules all things. Their concept of the material, however, was not the corpuscular theory of the rival school of the Epicureans, but presupposed the cosmos as constituting one homogenous field of energy and matter (related to the “spiritual” elements of fire and air and the “heavier” elements water and earth). “The only way fairly to describe Stoic physical theory would seem to be as a field theory, as opposed to the corpuscular theory of the atomists,” as Johnny Christensen states in his *Essay on the Unity of Stoic Philosophy*. But the role of the divine Logos is exactly to explain the *unity of differentiation and structure* within the cosmos: “‘Motion’ is most closely connected with structure (*logos*). It refers to the Parts of nature, implying maximum attention to structure and differentiation.”²⁴

I do not wish to claim that the Johannine concept of Logos is derived exclusively from Stoic tradition, for the Logos concept is semantically flexible and has connotations of Jewish, Stoic, and Platonic backgrounds. On the

other hand, it seems out of place to understand the Gospel of John exclusively from Platonic or even Gnostic resources. There is in the Gospel of John no split (Plato: *chōrismos*) between the eternal Logos of God and the Logos at work in creation *within* the one field of physical differentiations, biological life, and human enlightenment. “He was in the world, but the world, though it owed its being to him, did not recognize him. He came to his own, and his own people would not accept him” (John 1:10–11). The problem is not that there should be any principled distance between God and world; the problem is the failing human awareness there of the Logos that came into this world.

Where Christians departed from the Stoics was in their insistence on the pre-material status of the divine Logos. I assume (in contrast to some of my Copenhagen colleagues) that Stoic ideas were more easily appropriated in the domain of cosmology than in the domain of theology proper. John himself seems to have understood Logos as being immaterial in its primordial state in God (John 1:1–2), even though Logos from the beginning was oriented towards the world of creation (John 1:3) and the incarnation in time and space (John 1:14). If so, the later Alexandrian distinction between the immaterial Logos “in the beginning” (*logos asarkos*) and the incarnate Logos “in the midst of time” (*logos ensarkos*) is to some extent supported by the logic of the text itself of John's Prologue. The Christian tradition here retained a Jewish sense of God's transcendence (1 Kgs 8:27), while balancing this “Platonizing” element with a strong “Stoicizing” doctrine of the incarnation of the Logos: “And Logos became flesh [*sarx*]” (John 1:14).

Divine Logos Assuming the Depths of Materiality (John 1:14)

Like the idea of Logos, the term *flesh* is also semantically flexible, and this may well be intentional. *Sarx* can mean simply “body and flesh” referring to the historical person of Jesus. This is beyond doubt the case. But *sarx* can also mean “sinful flesh” (see John 3:6), thereby intimating that the incarnation of Logos as Jesus Christ already anticipates the death of Jesus for all humankind (John 19:30). But finally *flesh* simply refers to the realm of materiality in its most general extension, perhaps with a note of frailty and transitoriness. This reference is presupposed also in John, if John is seen as a philosophical as well as theological text, as was usual in the first centuries, when Christianity was seen by the apologists as the “true philosophy” (Justin Martyr, and others).

In this perspective, John 1:14 is a witness of *deep incarnation*: the incarnational move of the divine Logos is not just into a particular human person in isolation, “the blood and flesh” of Jesus. The incarnation also extends into Jesus as an exemplar of humanity and as an instantiation of the “frail flesh” of biological creatures. With the cosmological background of the Prologue in

mind, we can now also say that the divine Logos, in the process of incarnation, unites itself with the very basic physical stuff. In other words, the flesh that is assumed in Jesus Christ is not only the man Jesus but also the entire realm of humanity, animality, plant life, and soil.

The most high (the eternal thought and power of God) and the very lowest (the flesh that comes into being and decays) are thus united in the process of incarnation.²⁵ Incarnation signifies God's coming-into-flesh, so that God the creator and the world of creation are conjoined in Jesus Christ. God links up with all vulnerable creatures, with the sparrows in their flight as well as in their fall (see Matt 10:29), indeed, with all the grass that comes into being one day and ceases to exist the next day. *In Christ, God is conjoining all creatures and enters into the biological tissue of creation itself in order to share the fate of biological existence. God becomes Jesus, and in him God becomes human, and (by implication) foxes and sparrows, grass and soil.*

Synoptic and Pauline Correlates to Deep Incarnation

This interpretation gains weight from considering the Synoptic Jesus traditions as well as the Pauline traditions. In the Jesus tradition, the connection between Jesus and earth is persistent. In the preaching of Jesus, he compares the growth of God's kingdom to the growth of mustard seed (Matt 13:31–32; Mark 4:30–32; Luke 13:18–19); he tells the disciples to be as unworried as the birds of the air and the lilies of the field (Matt 6:25–34; Luke 12:22–31); and he teaches them to pray, "Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt 6:10; par. Luke 11:2). The disciples, moreover, are required to become "salt of the earth" (Matt 5:13; par. Mark 9:50; Luke 14:34–35). And to the people who were not part of the inner circle of the disciples Jesus says, "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth" (Matt 5:5; par. Luke 6:20). And first and foremost, Jesus referred to himself as the Son of Man, in Aramaic most likely *bar'ənash* corresponding to the *ben adam* of Hebrew. Jesus is the "son of Adam" who himself was the "son of the earth" (earth, in Hebrew, is *adamah*). Jesus was thus the son of the son of earth. As is well known, this connection between Adam and Christ is considered by Paul by seeing Jesus as the *second Adam*, the new earthenling (Rom 5).

In the Pauline tradition the idea of incarnation is spelled out both in the *dimension of depth* and in the *dimension of length*. We thus find the important image of the Church as the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12–13), which signifies a continuation of the process of incarnation (often called "inhabitation," or "indwelling"). Jesus is the head of the body, while the Church constitutes the members of the Body of Christ. Also the bread and wine of the Eucharist are the body and blood of Christ (1 Cor 11) to be spent into the bodies of the participants in order to be circulated in them and thereby facilitating the

social fluidity of the communion. Finally Paul sees the individual body as the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. He asks, almost impatiently, "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?" and "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you?" (1 Cor 6:15, 19).

However, the depth-dimension is also present in Paul, the theologian of the cross. For his point is that not hardship, or distress, or persecution will separate us from the love of Christ (Rom 8:35): "For I am convinced that *neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Rom 8: 38–39).

The crux of interpretation here lies in two questions: (1) Who is the "us" that Paul speaks about? What is the scope of soteriology? And (2) why can nothing in creation separate us from the love of Christ? Let me briefly present my interpretation. First, the "us" is anything and anybody within the world of creation that through the spirit is "groaning in labour pains," "waiting for adoption, the redemption of their bodies" in order to become united with the love of Christ. Thus also here salvation has both a temporal dimension of "length" and a spatial dimension of "depth" (Rom 8:22–25). Second, how does salvation come into being? Not, I would argue, by Jesus transporting bodies out of this world—exempting them, as it were, from bodily conditions—but on the contrary by bringing their bodies into the bond of God's love in Christ, who is present both in life and death, in the heights as well as in the depths of creation. This is what one might call the Pauline version of deep incarnation.

Assuming the Costs of Complexity: From Cave to Tomb

As Paul was painfully aware, living in a material world means living in a vulnerable world. Also in John the scope of the term *flesh* involves a specific sensitivity to frailty of existence. Consequently there is an almost "natural" connection between the incarnation of the Son of God and the cross of Christ. "It is finished," or, "It is fulfilled," are the last words of Jesus according to the Gospel of John (19:30). As mentioned, there might be connotations of defilement or sin in the concept of *sarx* (so John 3:6), as we also have it in the letters of Paul. But the standard denotations of the term *sarx* are to bodily physicality and vulnerability.

In this perspective, the incarnation of the Son of God is not only an *event* associated with the birth of Jesus, but also a *process* that extends through the life story of Jesus and ends in his death. Think of the many icons in Eastern Christianity, where the birth of Jesus takes place in a cave carved out of the earth that anticipates his tomb at the end of his life. Jesus, as it were, emerged out of the earth, and returns to the earth, from which he is to be raised again.

Thus, Jesus is not only the second Adam who assumed flesh but also the second Job who assumed pain. The Son of God goes down with his fellow creatures, maintaining fellowship with human beings, sparrows, and grass, even into the processes of decay, so that no creature shall ever be left alone in death. "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father," said Jesus (Matt 10:29). After the crucifixion of Christ, it could now be added that no sparrow dies without the Son of God, sent by the heavenly Father into the very biological tissue of life and death. To God, the dirty earth is as close by as are the heavens. In Christ, "high" and "low" communicate with one another.

In this sense God has not only created a world of creation capable of producing ever more complex forms of life. God the Son also carries the costs of complexity by being present in "the least of my brothers" (Matt 25). Here is a correction to the grand-scale thinking of deep ecology. In the depths of incarnation, God does not just conjoin with the ecosystem of Gaia in its totality. God also unites himself with the individual, vulnerable creatures. In Christ, God has undertaken the intertwining of life and death for the benefit of all creatures who in their own bodies experience life's blossoming but also—and often painfully prematurely—become familiar with suffering and with the untimely termination of life.

Such a bio-physical interpretation of incarnation will have significant consequences for understanding the relation between God and the material world at large, and biological existence in particular. The divine Logos is then present not only in the body of the Church but also at the very core of material existence. In the perspective of deep incarnation, the death of Jesus fulfills the self-divesting nature of the divine Logos for all sentient and suffering beings, human or animal. And Logos would be not only the Light for every human being entering the world (John 1:9), but also the "Light of the world" and "Light of life" (John 8:12).

Such a cosmic interpretation of the gospel is possible already against the Jewish background of the idea of God having his "home" (*shekinah*) in the midst of the world. But the interpretation is made even more plausible by understanding John's Prologue as having Stoic background assumptions, for in this interpretation Logos is affirmed as the living bond between the ultimate reality of God and the penultimate reality of the world. Hence it is hardly a coincidence that two concepts of corresponding extension, *logos ensarkos* and *sarx*, are brought together in John 1:14. The point is here that whatever is touched by Christ will not remain unaltered.²⁶

This view anticipates the principle later formulated by Gregory Nazianzus in *Letter* 101.32: "For that which he has not assumed [*aproslēpton*] he has not healed [*atherapeuton*], but that which is united to his Godhead [*ho de hēnōtai tōi theōi*] is also saved [*sōzetai*]."²⁷ Gregory's point was exactly that the divine Logos lives comfortably together with human rationality, without the one excluding the other. God does not exclude humanity, just as humanity

does not exclude God. "Keep, then, the whole man [*anthropon hólon*], and mingle Godhead [*mixon tēn theotēta*] therewith that you may benefit me in my completeness [*teléōs*]."²⁸

Conclusions

I have argued that the "flesh" assumed by Logos denotes the person and body of Jesus, yet also signifies the whole dimension of materiality, especially the aspects of complex matter related to weakness and disintegration, for complexity is costly: what is unique and precious is bound to disintegrate in the end. Accordingly, when God in Christ became human, the Son of God entered the dimension of material life, in which human beings die, sparrows fly and fall to the ground, and grass grows and withers away. It is as natural for God to dwell in the world of dirt and waste as it is for God to be present in the uniquely human characteristics of highly developed consciousness, morality, religious imagination, and "God-consciousness" (Schleiermacher).

The concept of "deep incarnation" thus aims to formulate the scope of salvation in such a way that God's incarnation stretches into the depths of our planet's conditions for life. This view is developed in critical interaction with the idea of "deep ecology" coined by the Norwegian eco-philosopher Arne Næss. I have argued, however, that a Christology of deep incarnation cannot rest content with a systemic view of ecological order as proposed by deep ecology. The holistic notion of the interconnectedness of all things must be balanced by a sense of the frailty of individuality, of the uniqueness of human life, of the singularity of each sparrow, and of the particular beauties of lilies, of grass, and of weed.

Notes

- 1 J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, *Alone in the World? Science and Theology on Human Uniqueness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 111–162.
- 2 J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, "What Makes Us Human? The Interdisciplinary Challenge to Theological Anthropology and Christology," *Toronto Journal of Theology*, 26 no. 2 (2010): 143–160.
- 3 Kevin Hector, "The Mediation of Christ's Normative Spirit: A Constructive Reading of Schleiermacher's Pneumatology," *Modern Theology* 24, no. 1 (2008): 1–22.
- 4 Niels Henrik Gregersen, "The Cross of Christ in an Evolutionary World," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 40, no. 3 (2001): 192–207.
- 5 Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1879), 2:1057–1059 (under 9: "speech," "utterance," and 2: "relation," "proportion").
- 6 Denis Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 52–60.
- 7 Christopher Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation: God, Evolution, and the Problem of Evil* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 75–77.
- 8 Celia Deane-Drummond, *Christ and Evolution: Wonder and Wisdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2009), 107, 128–159, 178–180.

- 9 See Season of Creation, <http://www.seasonofcreation.com/theology>, accessed September 19, 2009.
- 10 Elizabeth A. Johnson, "An Earthy Christology," *America Magazine*, April 13, 2009, http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=11566.
- 11 Liddel and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 2:1585 (under 2.2 and 2.3).
- 12 Arne Naess, "The Shallow and the Deep: Long Range Ecology Movement," *Inquiry* 16 (1973): 95–100, later developed in Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy*, trans. D. Rothenberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). See overview in "Deep Ecology," *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed. B. Taylor and M. Zimmermann (New York: Continuum, 2005) 1:456–460.
- 13 Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 174.
- 14 See the full list in Taylor and Zimmermann, "Deep Ecology"; italics mine.
- 15 "Whenever we celebrate something, we slaughter something," as Professor Ramathate Dolamo (University of South Africa) pointed out in discussions of this paper at the LWF Global Conference on Theology in the Life of the Lutheran Churches, March 28, 2009.
- 16 As is well known, a strong distinction between Jewish and Greek philosophy cannot be maintained in the centuries before and after date. *The Book of Wisdom* was heavily influenced by Stoic notions of providence (8), while Philo of Alexandria was influenced primarily by Platonism. However, as argued by Richard Horsley, Philo was also influenced by Stoicism, not least mediated by Cicero: "The parallel passages on the law of nature derive ultimately from a Stoic tradition on a universal law and right reason," Horsley argues in "The Law of Nature in Philo and Cicero," *Harvard Theological Review* 71, nos. 1–2 (1978): 35–59. To what extent also Cicero's version of Stoicism was itself influenced by Platonism, via the influence of Antiochus, as hypothesized by Horsley, remains more debatable. However, Roman Stoicism could be quite friendly to Platonist ontology as evidenced in Seneca's *Letter 58 and Letter 65*.
- 17 See Adolf von Harnack, "Über das Verhältniss des Prologs des vierten Evangeliums zum ganzen Werk," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 2, no. 3 (1892): 189–231; and Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (1941; trans., Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971).
- 18 This view is developed within the Copenhagen School of New Testament scholarship; see Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), and Engberg-Pedersen, *Cosmology and Self in the Apostle of Paul: The Material Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). On John, see Gitte Buch-Hansen, "It Is the Spirit That Gives Life": *A Stoic Understanding of Pneuma in John's Gospel* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010). As Buch-Hansen rightly argues, "Neither the traditional conception of Platonic philosophy as a radical dualism with its world of shadows and unstable, unreal phenomena nor apocalypticism with its judgement of this evil aeon can capture the Fourth Gospel's affirmative stance towards the world" (5). I thank Engberg-Pedersen and Buch-Hansen for inspiration and clarifications on these issues.
- 19 C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (1955; London: SPCK, 1972), 130: "theos, without the article, is predicative and describes the nature of the Word."
- 20 Tertullian, *Adversus Praxeas* 5: "non sermonalis a principio, sed rationalis Deus etiam ante principium" (*Patrologia Latina*, ed. Jacques-P. Migne [Paris: Garnier, 1861], 2:160).
- 21 Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolyicum*, ed. Jacques-P. Migne (Paris: Garnier, 1857), 2:10.
- 22 Elsewhere I have elaborated on the similarities between "cutting-information" that creates differences, and the "shaping-information" that builds up larger structures over time; see "God, Matter, and Information: Towards a Stoicizing Logos Christology," in *Information and the Nature of Reality: From Physics to Metaphysics*, ed. Paul Davies and Niels Henrik Gregersen, 309–349 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
- 23 Very often this verse 9 is translated as if it were the Logos that was about to come into the world. But "coming" (Greek: *erchomenon*) is more naturally attached to "the human being."

- (*anthrōpon*), than to the Light (*to phōs*) which is the earlier subject of the sentence. Also, the received translation exemplifies an impatient exegesis: the incarnation in Jesus does not appear until verse 14.
- 24 Johnny Christensen, *An Essay on the Unity of Stoic Philosophy* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1962), 30, 24.
- 25 As argued by Richard Bauckham, also a Second Temple Jewish monotheism could allow for a "high Christology" but would be incompatible with viewing Jesus as an intermediary figure, as in the angelic Christology of Christian Middle Platonists (e.g., Origen): "[A] high Christology was possible within a Jewish monotheistic context, not by applying to Jesus a Jewish of semi-divine intermediary status, but by identifying Jesus directly with the God of Israel, including Jesus in the unique identity of this one God," Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism & Christology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 4.
- 26 A quintessential task for further clarification will be to differentiate between different ways of the agential presence of Christ in the world of creation. For example, Christ may be said to be present in the human condition at large, but for sentient beings in particular. And again, Christ is present for the victims of Holocaust as co-sufferer (as "Gospel"), but as the constant challenger in relation to the evil-doers in concentration camps (as "Law").
- 27 Greek text in Grégoire de Nazianze, *Lettres Théologiques*, ed. Paul Gallay, Sources Chrétiennes 208 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1974), 50. English translation in Edward Roche Hardy, ed., *Christology of the Later Fathers*, The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954), 218.
- 28 Gregory Nazianzen, *Epistola* 101.36. Text in *Sources Chrétiennes* 208, 52; trans. in Hardy, *Christology*, 219.