"The Passions of His Flesh"
St Cyril of Alexandria and the Emotions of the Logos

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***Abstract**: Navigating the presupposition of divine impassibility, Nestorius' charge of* theopatheia *and the inevitable anthropomorphism in ascribing emotions to God, St Cyril of Alexandria paradoxically proclaimed that Christ suffered impassibly* (ἀπαθὼς ἔπαθεν)*. Yet he also stressed that Christ suffered in the flesh* (σαρκὶ πέπονθεν) *for our salvation. Likewise, the question of the Logos' emotions was essentially a soteriological one. Drawing on recent studies in the history of emotions, this paper revisits Cyril's position on the matter in his commentary on the gospel according to St John – the Evangelist who most profoundly narrated Christ's feelings. In reconsidering the Cyrillian and early Byzantine understanding of emotions, this paper also explores whether an alliance between theology and emotionology can shed new light on the mystery of the person of Christ.*

Why did Jesus weep? The answer is far from intuitive. We might say he was bemoaning Jerusalem, lamenting Lazarus' death, or fearing his impending crucifixion.[1] Such readings suffer from rampant reductionism. William Blake and the history of emotions

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will tell us that "a tear is an intellectual thing," insofar as we cry because we think.[2] However, in the case of the incarnate Logos, Jesus' tear is more than this; it is a theandric phenomenon, expressing a complex interaction of both human and divine natures within the one person of Christ. Despite the inherent astonishment that accompanies "seeing the tearless nature weeping (βλέπων δακρύουσαν τὴν ἀδάκρυτον φύσιν)," [3] St Cyril of Alexandria held that it was Christ's appropriation of flesh[4] that made it possible for the Logos to experience human emotions and transform them.

Indeed, Cyril's insistence on God making human life his very own was a cornerstone of his Christology. It was a constant point of reference as he navigated the presupposition of divine impassibility, Nestorius' charge of *theopatheia* and the inevitable anthropomorphism in ascribing emotions to God. While "nobody is so mad as to imagine the all-transcending nature capable of suffering"[5] it was none other than one of the Trinity who – becoming "a partaker in flesh and blood"[6] – "suffered in the flesh, [was] crucified in the flesh [and] tasted death in the flesh."[7] For Cyril, the divine-human union of the Incarnation saw God compassionately deign to an ineffable *kenosis*. Without an ontological and personal hypostatic

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1 See Luke 19:41, John 11:35 and Hebrews 5:7, respectively.

2 Jerome Neu, *A Tear is an Intellectual Thing: The Meanings of Emotion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 2, 14-40. And, as William James (and perhaps St Augustine before him) said, we do not cry because we are sad, we are sad because we cry.

3 St Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, PG 74, 56A. The translation of this text and throughout this paper is my own but heavily based on those of P. E. Pusey, *Commentary on the Gospel According to S. John,* vol. I*, S. John I–VII* (Oxford: J. Parker, 1874) and R. Randell, *Commentary on the Gospel According to S. John,* vol. II*, S. John IX–XXI* (London: Walter Smith, 1885).

4 By 'flesh' Cyril means the whole of human nature, a body complete with a rational soul. See for example Cyril's *Commentary on John* 1 (on John 1:14).

5 Cyril of Alexandria, 'On the Creed,' in Lionel R. Wickham (ed.), *Cyril of Alexandria: Select Letters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 123.

6 Hebrews 2:14.

7 See 'Anathema 12' in Cyril of Alexandria, 'Third Letter to Nestorius,' in Wickham (ed.) *Cyril of Alexandria: Select Letters*, 33.

union, if the Logos did not willingly embrace the finitude of material existence and appropriate the whole of human nature, there cannot be a real *communicatio idiomatum*[8] and any claim to becoming "partakers of the divine nature"[9] is chimeric. Although the mystery of the theandric union was beyond the categorisation of the Alexandrian and Cappadocian fathers – indeed, the mystery itself eludes conception – it was Cyril's rejection of Nestorian dualism and avowal of one hypostasis out of two natures that prepared the way for the text of the Chalcedonian Christological formula.[10] Moreover, the synergism engendered by this single hypostasis possessing both natures at once profoundly shaped Cyril's thinking when it came to the question of Christ's emotions.

Before looking more closely at how Cyril perceived the emotions of the Logos in his commentary on the gospel according to St John – the Evangelist who most profoundly narrated Christ's feelings – it is worth noting the recent resurgence in the study of emotions. The discipline of the history of emotions is unearthing rich insights into the cultural, social and political spheres of the medieval and early modern worlds. Determining

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[8] Cyril himself did not employ the phrase *communicatio idiomatum* 'communication of idioms (περιχώρησις ἰδιωμάτων)' but often alluded to the concept by narrating the mysterious exchange of properties between the divine and human natures of Christ in his exegetical works. The idea emerges as early as Origen but is not fully articulated until the sixth century and beyond. See Norman Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria* (London: Routledge, 2000), 43, 217. Cf. St John of Damascus, 'Concerning the manner of the mutual communication (ἀντιδόσεως),' in *The Orthodox Faith* 3.4 (PG 94, 997D): "Christ is both natures at once (συναμφότερον), he is called both God and man, both created and uncreated, both passible and impassible…"

[9] 2 Peter 1:4.

[10] "Following therefore the holy fathers, we confess one and the same Lord Jesus Christ […] acknowledged in two natures which undergo no confusion, no change, no division, no separation (ἐν δύο φύσεσιν ἀσυγχύτως, ἀτρέπτως, ἀδιαιρέτως, ἀχωρίστως γνωριζομένον) – the difference of the natures being by no means taken away because of the union, but rather the distinctive character of each being preserved, and [each] combining in one person and hypostasis…" See Jaroslav Pelikan, *Credo: Historical and Theological Guide to Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 201. Cf. Cyril of Alexandria, 'Third Letter to Nestorius,' in Lionel R. Wickham (ed.) *Cyril of Alexandria*, 23.

emotions' historical significance gained particular momentum when the Stearnses coined the term 'emotionology' in the 1980s.[11] Of course, theories of emotion go as far back as Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics, and their ideas still influence us today. Given it is impossible to traverse the sheer magnitude of this anfractuous field of study in the allotted space, especially the idea of the "intelligence of emotions"[12] and the notion that studying emotions of the past is akin to navigating "a foreign country,"[13] only the context of emotions as 'passions' in Late Antiquity will be examined. A lexical analysis of the Greek word for passion (πάθος) will be indispensable. Allusions to early church fathers' conception of passions will be made before finally returning to Cyril's text.

Passions in Byzantium: from *Pathos* to Emotion

In the Byzantine lexicon, the Greek word for emotion – πάθος – is often translated as 'passion' but it does not suggest extreme emotions in the modern sense of the word. It literally means something that befalls someone or the soul – an event or calamity – and is linked to the verb πάσχω ('I suffer' or 'I experience').[14] Looking carefully at the history of emotions and its mental categories, it is not a case of false friends to loosely equate the modern word of 'emotion' (from the verb *emoveo*, to move, to change, to agitate) with πάθος or *passio*. After all, it was only in the nineteenth

[11] "The attitude or standards that a society, or a definable group within a society, maintains towards basic emotions and their appropriate expression [and] ways that institutions reflect and encourage these attitudes in human conduct." See Peter N. Stearns & Carol Z. Stearns, 'Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards,' *American Historical Review* 90 (October 1985), 813.

[12] Marcel Proust's conception of emotions as "geological upheavals of thought." See Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[13] See David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

[14] G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), vol. 4, 992, 1049-50. See also Alexander Kazhdan & Anthony Cutler, 'Emotions (τὰ πάθη),' in Alexander P. Kazhdan et al (eds), *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

century that the former supplanted the latter.[15] Modern scholarship often uses 'passion' and 'emotion' interchangeably and this mutual typology even holds for antiquity, as many scholars have shown.[16] However, given Christian psychology in late antiquity was often a mix of Greek philosophy and Jewish anthropology, it would be ill-advised to brazenly throw lexical caution to the wind on every occasion.

Nonetheless, diachronically, the word displays a remarkable semantic continuity in denoting emotion and passion. Let us go back towards antiquity before we return to modernity. In the New Testament, the Greek noun πάθος, which appears only on three occasions and invariably in a negative context, bespeaks "lustful passion."[17] While Liddell and Scott's primary definition of πάθος is "anything that befalls one," "a passion, emotion" comes in as a close second followed by "any passive state."[18] Babiniotis' *Dictionary of the Modern Greek Language* defines πάθος as "the intensity of emotions" or as a "fiery desire."[19] Interestingly, in its plural form, πάθη, it retains its meaning of "suffering," which is also the definition of the verb, πάσχω.[20] Now let us look more closely at how the passions fared in early Byzantium.

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15 See Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

16 See, for example, Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind*, Simo Knuuttila, *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004) and David Konstan, *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks: Studies in Aristotle and Classical Literature* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2006). St Athanasius' hagiographical account of St Antony was also profoundly influential, especially for Evagrius Ponticus. See Athanasius of Alexandria, *The Life of Antony*, trans. Tim Vivian & Apostolos N. Athanassakis (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2003).

17 The three occasions are: Romans 1:26, Colossians 3:5 and 1 Thessalonians 4:5. For the New Testament definition, see Barclay M. Newman Jr., *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993), 130.

18 H. G. Liddell & R. Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 584.

19 George D. Babiniotis, *Dictionary of the Modern Greek Language* (Athens: Centre of Lexicology, 1998), 1311.

20 Ibid., 1367.

The theology of the Alexandrian and Cappadocian fathers was pivotal in shaping the Byzantine understanding of passions against the backdrop of Hellenism and classical philosophy.[21] Likewise, the desert fathers and the Eastern monastic tradition more broadly influenced Christianity's theoretical conception of the passions. In fact, Evagrius Ponticus' schema of eight generic thoughts – λογισμοί – was adopted by John Cassian and conveyed to the West, later to be transformed into the now infamous list of the seven deadly sins.[22] For Byzantium, passion was a far more homogenous category than a restrictive definition of emotion would presume. The passions included appetites – instinctive cravings such as hunger and thirst – and forms of human behaviour – rudeness or loquaciousness – as well as emotions with a salient cognitive dimension.[23]

In Byzantine literature, the modern dichotomy between emotion and reason was not paramount; what mattered was differentiating between good and bad passions and either transforming them or making them the target of spiritual warfare. More than half of the thirty rungs on St John Climacus' *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* are about the struggle against the passions. Even human passibility was not a curse but part of divine providence: "[The passions of the soul] are gifts from God, being moved by the guidance and rule of the Logos."[24] Emotions were not necessarily targeted for extirpation but for healing, reorientation and transformation. Anger, when directed against the devil, was a positive passion but, in most cases, it was negative.[25] A gentle smile sat well with the solemnity

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21 Knuutila, *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy*, 111-76.

22 See Columba Stewart, 'Evagrius Ponticus and the Eight Generic *Logismoi*,' in Richard Newhauser (ed.), *In the Garden of Evil: The Vices and Culture in the Middle Ages* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2005), 3-34.

23 See St John of Damascus, *The Orthodox Faith* 3.20 (PG 94, 1081AB-1084A).

24 St Gregory of Nazianzus, 'Against Anger' (PG 37, 813A-851A), in Brian Dunkle S.J. (ed.) *Poems on Scripture* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2012), 107.

25 Ibid., 107, 109: "For anger that seethes according to measure is a weapon against zeal, and without desire God is not attainable."

of a formal event, whereas laughter did not.[26] Fear was welcome if it was the fear of God but was often contrasted with the fear of punishment.[27] The love of God was regarded as a "blessed passion"[28] whereas the love of self was thought to be the very first passion.[29] Tears of compunction were a gift from God but could be manipulated by imperial figures such as Emperor Leo VI who, in the tenth century, publicly wept – albeit hypocritically – to make amends for his fourth marriage and restore his communion with the Church.[30]

However, the abiding influence of Stoicism lingered in the writings of Philo of Alexandria, Nemesios of Emesa and Synesios of Cyrene to mention only a few. Philo condemned the passions, describing them as irrational movements of the soul – yet he tolerated the mediocrity of *metriopatheia* (the moderation of emotion).[31] Nemesios similarly defined emotion as a kind of "movement" (κἰνησις) that was contrary to nature.[32] And Synesios of Cyrene identified emotion with the very nature of the devil who is "passion alive and in movement."[33] Others such as St Gregory of Nyssa and St Maximus the Confessor defended the passions as integral aspects of human nature that play a vital role in the spiritual ascent. In his

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[26] Martin Hinterberger, 'Emotions in Byzantium,' in Liz James (ed.), *A Companion to Byzantium* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 123-34. Whereas Jerome and Basil the Great rejected laughter as an ungodly emotion, John Chrysostom and other church fathers were more tolerant, denouncing only excessive laughter. Ecclesiastical reproach notwithstanding, the festive atmosphere of a Byzantine banquet was characterised by much convivial laughter. See Alexander Kazhdan, 'Laughter (γέλως),' in *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, op. cit.

[27] St Basil the Great, *Homily on Psalm* 33 (PG 29, 369C).

[28] St Maximus the Confessor, *Centuries on Love* 2.30 (PG 90, 993B).

[29] St Maximus the Confessor, *To Thalassius* prol. (PG 90, 253D-256D).

[30] Martin Hinterberger, 'Tranen in der byzantinischen Literatur. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Emotionen,' *JOB* 56 (2006), 36.

[31] See Knuuttila, *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy*, esp. 111-19.

[32] PG 40, 673C. See Alexander Kazhdan & Anthony Cutler, 'Emotions (τὰ πάθη),' *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*.

[33] *Providentia* 1.10. Quoted in Kallistos T. Ware, 'The Meaning of "Pathos" in Abba Isaias and Theodoret of Cyrus,' *Studia Patristica* 20 (1989), 317.

dialogue with St Macrina – *On the Soul and the Resurrection* – Gregory's sister presents the emotions as neutral forces; neither inherently evil nor good but judged according to their mode of use:

> Therefore if a person uses these emotions according to their right principle [κατὰ τὸν δέοντα χρήσαι λόγον], receiving them into himself without falling into their power, he will be like some king who, by using the many hands of his servants for assistance, will easily accomplish his virtuous purpose.[34]

Macrina and Gregory – and indeed the Cappadocian fathers – rework the Stoic notion of good and bad use (χρῆσις) of emotions, marrying it with the Aristotelian view of virtue as essentially teleological.[35] Maximus echoed the Cappadocian thinking on passions, emphasising their transformation through the ascetic life and placing them within an eschatological context. It is through the participation of the entire human person – including the passible faculties – in the grace of the Incarnation that passion can become a receptacle for the divine to dwell.[36] Indeed, within Maximus' Christological framework, it is not astonishing that he perceived the very deification of the human person to be a mystical emotion, describing it as a "supernatural passion (ὑπὲρ φὺσιν τὸ πάθος), without boundaries."[37]

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[34] PG 46, 65C. The translation is from Catharine P. Roth (ed.), *St Gregory of Nyssa: On the Soul and the Resurrection* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993), 59-60.

[35] See Paul M. Blowers, 'Hope for the Passible Self: The Use and Transformation of the Human Passions in the Fathers of the Philokalia,' in Brock Bingaman and Bradley Nassif (eds), *The Philokalia: A Classic Text of Orthodox Spirituality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 216-29; J. Warren Smith, *Passion and Paradise: Human and Divine Emotion in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2004), 75-103; Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, 78-101.

[36] See Paul M. Blowers, 'Gentiles of the Soul: Maximus the Confessor on the Substructure and Transformation of the Human Passions,' *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4 (1996): 57-85; Athanasios Vletsis, *Original Sin in the Theology of Maximus the Confessor: An Investigation into the Origins of an Ontology of Created Things* (Katerine: Tertios, 1998), 182-90; Adam G. Cooper, *The Body in St Maximus the Confessor: Holy Flesh, Wholly Deified* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[37] St Maximus the Confessor, *To Thalassius* 22, scholion 6 (PG 90, 324B).

Although Cyril belonged to the school of thought that adumbrated a positive view of the passions, considerable agreement on Christ's passions had not yet been achieved. Cyril did not follow Gregory of Nyssa or Athanasius the Great, in ascribing Christ's emotions to his human nature. Interpreting the events of John 11:1-44, the bishop of Nyssa differentiated between the human and divine natures of Christ, ascribing the acts and attributes of Christ to one but not the other:

> It is not the human nature that raises up Lazarus; nor, on the other hand, is it the power that is impassible that weeps for him when he is lying in the grave. But the tear proceeds from the man, the life from the true [divine] life.[38]

Likewise, Athanasius attributed sayings such as "Let this cup pass" and the cry of abandonment on the cross to the humanity of Christ.[39] Similarly, the Christological quagmire created by "Jesus increas[ing] in wisdom and stature"[40] was not easily resolved; did only the human nature grow in wisdom?[41]

Cyril did not engage in such sharp differentiation. Although the cry of abandonment was the voice of Christ's human nature, it was also the voice of the Logos incarnate, which rescued the human condition from dereliction.[42] Of course, Cyril was not so brazen as to suggest that the divine

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38 St Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* 3.3.65, quoted in Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 276.

39 Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 1: *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1971), 245.

40 Luke 2:52.

41 See the discussion in Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 1, 243-56.

42 In *On the Unity of Christ*, Cyril writes that Christ, in asking God "why have you forsaken me," was effectively saying: "the first man has transgressed. He slipped into disobedience, and neglected the commandment he received […]. But you Lord made me a second beginning for all on earth, and I am called the Second Adam […]. Now give me the good things of your kindness, undo

nature of God itself experienced human feelings. After all, only those with no order in their thinking could speak about the transmission of human feelings to the actual Godhead.[43] So what is the Cyrillian apprehension of Christic emotions? Does Christ experience the entire spectrum of human feeling or only the so-called "natural and blameless passions,"[44] such as fear, joy and grief? Is it only on account of a human body that the Logos felt angry, sad or abandoned, or was a rational soul necessary?

Another unavoidable question looms: if our passions are not His passions – "For God experiences emotion nothing like I experience emotion (Πάσχει γὰρ οὐδὲν ὧν ἐγὼ πάσχω Θεός)"[45] – are they a prelapsarian or postlapsarian human condition? On the one hand, humankind's creation in the image of God might suggest the latter. On the other hand, how could passion have been absent from the sin of the first-created? Gregory of Nyssa intriguingly posited that humanity's passible nature was a gift from God in prevision of the exile from Eden.[46] For Maximus' part, a consequence of Adam and Eve's ill-conceived choice was the introduction of passion

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the abandonment, rebuke corruption and set a limit on anger." See John A. McGuckin, *St Cyril of Alexandria on the Unity of Christ* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995), 105-7.

43 See Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 273.

44 See the dogmatic florilegium entitled *The Doctrine of the Fathers on the Incarnation of the Logos*, which was ascribed to a certain Anastasius, discussed in Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 2: *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600-1700)* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 85-87; St John of Damascus, *The Orthodox Faith* 3.20 (PG 94, 1081AB-1084A).

45 St Gregory of Nazianzus, 'Against Anger' (PG 37, 839A), in Dunkle, *Poems on Scripture*, 108. I have modified the translation after reflecting on the context of the entire poem and consulting Liddell and Scott, op. cit., 612, where the third meaning of πάσχω is "to be affected in a certain way, be in a certain state of mind, entertain certain feelings."

46 Blowers, 'Hope for the Passible Self,' 220. Cf. St Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, PG 44, 189B-192A. Cf. Panayiotis Nellas' analysis of the 'garments of skin' in *Deification in Christ: The Nature of the Human Person*, trans. Norman Russell (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), 43-91.

into creation.[47] In any case, this conundrum will help frame our approach to Cyril of Alexandria's treatment of Christ's emotions.

Cyril of Alexandria and the Emotions of the Logos

Cyril did not subscribe to a view of human passions as purely bodily and irrational phenomena. The rationality and spirituality of passion was fundamental to his thinking inasmuch as a "soulless and mindless body would not feel grief any more than it would conceive any kind of sadness, or would be seized with fear of future events."[48] However, the hypostasis of Christ presented a mind-boggling problem: if the incarnate Logos did not experience passion solely in his human body, how could his impassible divine nature be implicated in any feeling? When Jesus was "troubled in the Spirit,"[49] how does an exegete interpret the emotion felt by someone who knew he was soon to be betrayed?

Concerning this Christological quandary, Cyril's *Commentary on the Gospel According to John* is astonishingly adventurous. After acknowledging the inadequacy of human language "as a feeble medium of expressing such things as pass our understanding," Cyril suggests that Scripture employs "human phraseology" to express "God's emotion":

> Although the divine essence is subject to none of these passions (παθών) in any way that bears comparison with our feelings, it is moved (κινουμένης) to indignation the extent of which is known only to itself and is natural to itself alone...[50]

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47 "For if by Adam's wrong choice, passion, corruption and mortality – according to nature – were brought in, likewise by Christ's immutable resurrection, freedom from passion, incorruptibility and immortality – according to nature – returned." Maximus the Confessor, *To Thalassius* 42 (PG 90, 408BC). Maximus implied an intriguing dialectic between passion and freedom from emotion in human nature.

48 St Cyril of Alexandria, *To Augustus* 44, in E. Schwartz (ed.), *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* (Berlin: 1927-32), vol. 1, 1.5.58.

49 John 13:21.

50 St Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John* 9, on John 13:21 (PG 74, 136B).

Far from being some visceral movement, it is "the emotion/movement of the Godhead (τὴν τῆς θεότητος κίνησιν)" that engenders "an apparent condition of disturbance" in Christ.[51] Although Cyril's commentary here dares to grapple with the magnitude of the quandary he faced – teetering on the precipice of anthropomorphism – it is his notion of 'flesh' (σάρξ) as encompassing the whole of human nature that proved to be decisive.

The idea of a Logos capable of experiencing human emotions presupposed a Logos that had not only appropriated a human body but also a human soul when it became flesh. Although Cyril was seldom explicit in articulating the nuance he gave the word 'flesh,' there are instances where his writings emphasise its subtle meaning. Early in his *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, when interpreting John 1:14, Cyril is unequivocal in saying that any notion of σάρξ as referring to "human flesh alone unendowed with a soul" and not the entire living person is an "absurdity."[52] This nuance is also apparent in Cyril's later works, written during the outbreak of the Nestorian crisis and not only in his early exegetical writings.[53] Moreover, the significance of Christ's human soul for Cyril's understanding of the Logos' emotions – and indeed his entire Christology – is consistent with its importance for the Cappadocian fathers. It also echoes the classical idea of passions as movements of the soul and ways of understanding the world. Although this may solve the problem of why Christ had emotions, it does not answer the question of how he experienced them.

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[51] Ibid.

[52] St Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John* 1, on John 1:14 (PG 73, 160A).

[53] See L. Welch, 'Logos-Sarx? Sarx and the Soul of Christ in the Early Thought of Cyril of Alexandria,' *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 38 (1994): 271-92; Steve McKinion, *Words, Imagery and the Mystery of Christ* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 160-64; Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 162.

Interpreting the Johannine account of such events as the raising of Lazarus[54] and the allusion to the garden of Gethsemane,[55] Cyril presents the emotions Christ experiences without enforcing a sharp distinction between his flesh and divine nature. When Jesus wept before the tomb of his friend, his "holy flesh" inclined to tears but in such a way that the "ever undisturbed and calm" divinity ensured the grief was not excessive and "taught [the flesh] to feel things beyond its nature (τὰ ὑπὲρ φύσιν ἰδίαν διδασκομένη φρονεῖν)."[56] The concurrence of natures in Christ is such that not only does the Logos allow himself to experience a dignified measure of grief; he communicates divine attributes to the human emotion of sadness. His tears are not simply a passive or involuntary response, nor are they any ordinary intentional action; Christ weeps so that "he may put an end to our tears."[57] The act is not merely an example of how not to give way to abundant grief; it is a godly judgment of human suffering and a redemptive action that infuses tears with divine import.

When Christ experienced dread and timidity at the thought of death, asking his Father to save him from this hour, Cyril delicately interprets the dramatic statement – "Now is my soul troubled"[58] – as both a mark of his humanity and an intimation of his divinity. Emotions that are all too human were "active in Christ in a profitable way" insofar as they were "set in motion" not to prevail as they do in us, but so that they may be "cut short by the power of the Logos."[59] But Christ does not simply suppress unwanted passion; he "masters the emotion that has been aroused and immediately transforms that which has been conquered by fear into

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54 John 11:1-45.

55 John 12:27.

56 St Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John* 7, on John 11:33 (PG 74, 53A).

57 St Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John* 7, on John 11:35 (PG 74, 56A).

58 John 12: 27.

59 St Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John* 8, on John 12:27 (PG 74, 88D-89A).

incomparable courage."[60] Although Cyril does not feel compelled to ascribe these emotions to his human nature in an absolute and inflexible way, on this occasion he propounds that "the suffering of cowardice is a feeling that we cannot ascribe to the impassible Godhead, nor yet to the flesh; for it is an affection of the cogitations of the soul."[61] In doing so, he touches on the problem of human-divine consciousness in the person of Christ. Selfhood for Cyril was not simply biology and neurology but a mystery of divine creation.

The emotion of dread is ostensibly confined to the rational soul inasmuch as it is aroused by thoughts alone, by the apprehension of the forthcoming crucifixion and death. Yet this moment in the gospel is still well before his arrest, trial and passion. Such thought touching on future events and knowledge of things to come is not typically a human characteristic. To be sure, Cyril is careful not to suggest that these are the thoughts of the impassible Godhead who would not feel cowardice, but he is reluctant to delve into the psychology of Christ beyond the reference to his rational soul. He briefly flirts with the idea of the Logos only experiencing "natural passions" (πάθη φυσικά) that are not "classified among sins" but does not pursue any lasting relationship, let alone a consummation.[62] Nor does he speculate on whether human passion is a prelapsarian or postlapsarian condition. Such anthropological and cosmological considerations are left in abeyance so that Cyril can explore the soteriological implications of Christic emotions.

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[60] St Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John* 8, on John 12:27 (PG 74, 88D).

[61] St Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John* 8, on John 12:27 (PG 74, 89B).

[62] St Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John* 8, on John 12:27 (PG 74, 88D). Did Christ only experience the so-called 'natural and blameless passions,' such as fear and dereliction, which were especially evident a little before and during the crucifixion? Anastasius' *Doctrine of the Fathers on the Incarnation of the Logos* would have us think as much, classifying human emotions into two categories – those that were sinful and those that were blameless. But is this the *consensus patrum*? See Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 2, 86, 87.

Cyril's exegesis of this biblical excerpt then reaches its hermeneutical climax, discerning the mind of scripture and presenting a universal narrative told in terms of the drama of fall and salvation.[63] For Cyril, the question of the Logos' emotions was essentially a soteriological one:

> Moreover, just as death was brought to naught in no other way than by the death of the Saviour, so also with regard to each of the passions of the flesh (οὕτω καὶ ἐφ᾽ ἑκάστου τῶν τῆς σαρκὸς παθῶν). For unless [Christ] had felt cowardice (Εἰ μὴ γὰρ ἐδειλίασεν), human nature could not be freed from cowardice; unless He had experienced grief (εἰ μὴ ἐλυπήθη) there would never have been any deliverance from grief; unless He had been troubled and alarmed (εἰ μὴ ἐταράχθη καὶ ἐπτοήθη), no escape from these feelings could have been found. And with regard to every human experience (ἀνθρωπίνως γεγονότων), you will find exactly the corresponding thing in Christ. The passions of His flesh were aroused (τὰ τῆς σαρκὸς πάθη κεκινημένα), not that they might have the upper hand as they do in us, but in order that when aroused they might be thoroughly subdued by the power of the Word dwelling in the flesh, the nature thus undergoing a change for the better (πρὸς τὸ ἄμεινον μεταποιουμένης τῆς φύσεως).[64]

In making such sweeping and intrepid conclusions, in stark contrast to his earlier prudence, Cyril echoed Hebrews 4:15: "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise (μὴ δυνάμενον συμπαθήσαι) with our weaknesses, but was in all things tempted as we are yet without sin (πεπειρασμένον δὲ κατὰ πάντα καθ᾽ ὁμοιότητα χωρὶς ἁμαρτίαις)."[65] In contemplating Christ's emotions, the healing of a fallen humanity through the communication of idioms within the hypostatic union is what mattered, not whether an emotion was natural or unnatural. Christ did not suppress his humanity and its passions but divinised them. Indeed this notion that

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[63] See Frances M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 29-45.

[64] St Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John* 8, on John 12:27 (PG 74, 92D).

[65] Barbara Aland et al, *The Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 749.

Christ used human emotions divinely so as to effect our salvation is also prominent in the work of Maximus the Confessor.[66]

Taking this theory to its logical conclusion can lead to problematic conjecture about the spectrum of Christ's emotions. Is not the communication of idioms reciprocal? If he did not feel anger, lust or envy, subduing and transforming them at the moment of their arousal, how could humanity have been liberated from these passions? It is no wonder scholarship is divided over whether this section of Cyril's commentary can be attributed to the Alexandrian.[67] Moreover, it is not surprising that Byzantine theology avoided investigating the psychology of Christ along the lines of Nikos Kazantzakis' *The Last Temptation of Christ*.

Cyril presented Christ's human nature as deified in every respect but not divine by nature. As the new Adam, the Logos incarnate restored humanity to its ancient dignity and natural mode of existence. Precisely when this happened did pose a problem, especially when Jesus was portrayed in the gospel as increasing in wisdom and stature. Cyril retorted by saying that Christ could have brought his body to perfection at any time but this would have been "a monstrous affair and a violation of the words of the economy [of salvation]."[68] Christ the Saviour for Cyril is neither "the Logos of God apart from the humanity" nor "the temple born of the woman not united to the Logos."[69] Where a passage of the New Testament did not reflect the union of the two natures in Christ, it nonetheless intended it. Jesus performs miracles not only by his "almighty command" but also

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66 See *To Thalassius*, PG 90, 313D, where Maximus states that Christ heals "the passibility associated with pleasure."

67 See Jacques Liébaert, *La Doctrine Christologique de Saint Cyrille D'Alexandrie avant la querelle Nestorienne* (Lille: Facultes Catholiques, 1951), 131-7; Maurice F. Wiles, *The Spiritual Gospel* (London, Cambridge University Press, 1960), 147.

68 Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 1, 251.

69 St Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation of the Only-Begotten*, quoted in Jaroslav Pelikan (1971), 249.

through "the touch of his holy flesh."[70] Likewise, Christ's temptations, suffering and emotions were not attributed simply to his human nature but ascribed to the one incarnate Logos. To do otherwise would rend asunder the unified subjectivity of Christ into a human self and divine alter ego. Of course, in the fifth century, psychiatry was yet to formulate dissociative identity disorder and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* was not on the shelves of the local library.

Concluding Remarks

Notwithstanding the profound influence of Athanasian incarnational theology in his *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, Cyril's depiction of the Logos as the bridge between humanity and the Divinity presents a mysterious harmony between Christ's intimate bond with humankind and his oneness with God. Nevertheless, he faced a quandary that in some respects was insurmountable. On the one hand he was not so brazen as to assign mutability to the Divine, on the other he could not bring himself to disrupt the unity of the incarnate Logos by quarantining the human nature from the divine. His Christology was characterised by a far more subtle differentiation if not a mysterious integration; not merely a mixture of the two. For Cyril, the hypostasis was the source and centre of all actions and emotions.

The *kenosis*, the self-emptying of God the Logos, meant that the philosophical presupposition of divine impassibility was not immune from interrogation or even qualification. Indeed, Cyril's theology was not afraid to part ways with Hellenistic philosophy, even going as far as to ascribe divine emotions to the God of Scripture when interpreting the Old Testament.[71] Likewise, he did not view the question of whether one

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[70] St Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John* 4, on John 6:54 (PG 73, 577C).

[71] St Cyril of Alexandria, *Concerning the Adoration and Worship in Spirit and Truth*, book 1, book 5 (PG 68, 169D, 364C); Festal Letter 5.6, in Pierre Evieux et al. (eds), *Cyrille D'Alexandrie: Lettres festales,* Sources Chrétiennes 372 (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1991), 314. See Joseph F. Hallman, *The Descent of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991).

of the Trinity experienced emotions through the spectacles of logic. To do so would unravel his entire Christology, which was founded on the restoration of a fallen humanity through interaction "with that which has life by nature"[72] – a Christology often expressed in paradoxical language. Indeed, how else could he speak of God who – to invoke the Johannine phrase – is love? Ultimately, the questions that mattered were not of a philosophical nature; they were soteriological: "For that which has not been assumed (μὴ προσειληπται) has not been saved (οὐδὲ σέσωσται)."[73]

He did not delve too deeply into the amazingly complex interaction of Jesus' emotions – emotions forged in the smithy of a human body, rational soul and the divine nature. After all, his theopaschism was tied to the Logos incarnate, not to "the naked and not yet incarnate Logos."[74] It would have been intriguing had he commented on the facial expressions of Christ and their underlying emotions. Indeed, this kind of approach to iconography is ripe for the plucking by an art historian interested in the history of emotions. If only Cyril had also reflected on the following question: if one of the Trinity deigned to experience emotions for the sake of the divine drama of salvation, were these emotions culturally and socially constructed or were they universal?

Certainly this is not something Cyril considered, but if we follow his logic and exegesis, it cannot be said that the Logos only experienced the emotions of one particular man, born in Bethlehem, raised in a Jewish culture and in a Roman society two millennia ago. Although this might then lead us to a universalist reading of human feeling, it would be premature to leap to this conclusion. The flesh the Theotokos gave to one of the Trinity, despite being a historical event circumscribed by time and space, does not render Christ's assumption of human nature as limited by culture, society or even gender. In the person of Mary, the true Mother of God, "it is human

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[72] St Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John* 1, on John 1:14 (PG 73, 160BC).

[73] St Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John* 8, on John 12:27 (PG 74, 89D).

[74] Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 1, 247.

nature itself that is shown forth as the Theotokos."[75] The significance of the Incarnation for the salvation of the world cannot be otherwise.

What about the idea of emotional communities? That is, "groups which value certain emotions and adhere to the same norms of emotional expression."[76] As members of Christ's body, as a community that is taught to feel things beyond our nature, to use Cyril's expression, can it be said that Christianity strives to experience certain godly emotions, such as compunction, compassion and love – emotions that are activated in the ritual dynamics of the liturgy and understood within the matrix of a Christian commonwealth? Exploring the social, textual and liturgical community of Byzantium and the discourse of Christianity is a cornucopia that Barbara Rosenwein has already delved into by sketching the Latin legacy. In any case, it would be fair to say that for Cyril emotions are not limited by social determinism and they are not simply cultural constructs; above all they are given shape and form in humanity's encounter with the divine.

This paper began with a seemingly simple question: why did Jesus weep? Cyril of Alexandria did not provide a plain answer in his *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*: he grappled with the inadequacy of human language in articulating the mystery of the person of Christ; he resorted to paradoxical language and an array of evocative images; and he harnessed the soteriological framework of his thought. However, if he had been cornered on the issue and, unarmed as he was with the modern understanding of emotions and their history, perhaps he would have replied laconically: Jesus wept because he was the Son of God.

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[75] Panagiotis Nellas, 'The Mother of God and Theocentric Humanism,' in *Synaxis,* vol. 1: *Anthropology, Environment, Creation* (Montreal: Alexander Press, 2006), 138.

[76] Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2006), 2.