CHAPTER 16

The Four Chalcedonian Adverbs: A Reflection on Buddhist-Christian Dual Belonging

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Introduction

Reflecting on personal experience of practice in the Zen and Christian traditions, I suggest that the four adverbs of the Chalcedonian definition of faith offer a strong and effective framework within which to explore dual religious belonging. Formulated to address the salvific mystery of two natures in one person, the adverbs remind us that religious identity is always performed in a particular way, and therefore wholesale judgments about dual belonging are inevitably too simplistic to gain any real traction; they are apophatic in tone, and therefore not prescriptive; and they are oriented towards the goal of understanding what it might be to be most fully a person, most completely alive.

Scholars including Perry Schmidt-Leukel, Paul Knitter, and Peter Phan have already connected the Chalcedonian definition of the Christian faith with the contemporary discussion of dual religious belonging; rather than offer a detailed critical appreciation of their work here, I intend instead to offer some further thoughts focused on the significance of the adverbs (Knitter 2012; Schmidt-Leukel 2006: 113; Phan 2004: xxi). By way of a very brief (and inevitably rough-hewn) reminder, the Chalcedonian definition was formulated at a mid-fifth century ecumenical council as a means of marking out the boundaries of orthodox Christology, in response to an increasingly acrimonious controversy between two broad schools of thought, the Alexandrian and the Antiochene. The Antiochene approach stressed the full humanity and the full divinity of Christ to such a degree that it was felt to create what we might call a schizophrenic Christ, someone with rather too much going on inside to be capable of integration into a psychological whole. The Alexandrian approach, by contrast, achieved a much more secure sense of Christ as a being in whom divine and human nature were combined in a single individual agent, but appeared to do so at the cost of attributing to him a less than full humanity. The Council of Chalcedon defined Christ as “one person in two natures,” with four modifying adverbs (ἀσυγχυτως, ἀτρεπτως, ἀδιαιρετως, ἀχωριστως) usually rendered into English as “without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.”
Much more might be related, of course, including the ongoing controversies, the evaluations and re-evaluations of how far the decision favored either side in the debate, and the linguistic-philosophical wrestling that was required to take the Greek vocabulary of *hypostasis* and *ousia*, and craft an understanding of the human person that was new to these cultures. But prima facie, as others have already recognized, there is an intuitive sense that this Chalcedonian formula, addressing as it does the question of how one psychologically healthy and integrated individual can participate in or belong to two modes of life that have hitherto been seen as contradictory, might have something to offer a discussion of dual or even multiple religious belonging. It is the adverbs, though, that fascinate me.

The Point of Adverbs: We Belong after a Fashion

They fascinate me, first, because our discussion of religious belonging could often be greatly improved by the addition of more modifiers. Ascriptions of faith—or culture—identity are often made simply, so that we can focus on the question at hand, as to how one balances primary and secondary belongings, how far these belongings are complementary, how far incommensurate, how far mutually supportive and so on. But none of us belong, say, to the Christian tradition *simpliciter*; all who belong do so after a particular fashion—in an Anglican or a Reformed sort of way; half- or whole-heartedly; consonantly with or dissonantly from the fashion of our own family or social group; critically or unreflectively; more or less joyously. Furthermore, we all need to add at least one cultural, denominational or ideological modifier—we are liberal Episcopalians, Marxist Methodists, Neoplatonist Anglicans, Scottish Calvinists, African-American Baptists, or Polish Catholics. For some practitioners of dual belonging, the second religious tradition can be seen as an adverbial modifier of the first: for instance, some folks are Christian in a (more or less,  

1 I will speak here of ‘dual belonging’ rather than of ‘dual identity,’ partly because of the reminder that this phraseology contains, that there is a concrete praxis and a relationship to community involved, and partly to locate my thoughts in relation to the admirable work of Rose Drew in her (2011) *Buddhist and Christian*.

2 There is a depth of complexity to this process, as Ama Samy notes: it isn’t enough to say that one understand and performs one’s Christian identity through an engagement with the mystical tradition—one needs to specify whether it is an Eckhartian mysticism, or an Ignatian, and so on. (2007: 91).