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## **Properties Participating in Substance: the Trinitarian Theology of Severus of Antioch and Damian of Alexandria**

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## **Properties Participating in Substance: the Trinitarian Theology of Severus of Antioch and Damian of Alexandria**

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**Abstract:** This paper focuses on the Trinitarian theology of Severus of Antioch and Damian of Alexandria. It makes the case that in his polemic against the Chalcedonians Severus equates the hypostases with the hypostatic properties and further argues that the properties gain their substantial component through participation in a common substance that is located “above” the hypostases and thus different from them. It suggests that this understanding of the Trinity was later elaborated by the Monophysite patriarch Damian of Alexandria who engaged in a controversy with the Tritheists.

**Keywords:** Severus of Antioch; Trinitarian Theology; Chalcedonianism; Monophysitism

In the late fourth century the Cappadocian bishops Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa introduced into the theological discourse the distinction between substance and hypostasis. They declared that Father, Son and Spirit were one God because they shared the same account of being but that they were at the same time distinguished from each other through their characteristic properties ingeneracy, generacy and procession. Since the account of being, which constituted the divinity, was immanent in Father, Son and Spirit, each of the hypostases could be said to be comprised of two elements, the particular property and the common substance. In the fifth century this conceptual framework was accepted by all theologians, regardless of their understanding of the incarnation. Yet this was done in an unthinking fashion. Nobody asked whether his Christological position could be reconciled with Cappadocian Trinitarian theology. This situation changed only in the early sixth century. At that time the Chalcedonian theologian John of Caesarea claimed that the divine and the human components in the incarnated Word were two accounts of being, which established a twofold consubstantiality with the other persons of the Trinity and with the other human individuals. This position was rejected by Patriarch Severus of Antioch, the leader of the Monophysite sect. Severus declared that

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both the Word and the flesh were concrete individuals. In order to refute John's position, he shifted the discussion from the intensional to the extensional meaning of substance. Defining substance as the sum total of all hypostases belonging to a species, he concluded that according to John's teaching the entire Trinity would have become incarnate in the entire human race. Yet he could not simply suppress the intensional meaning because he had to explain what caused individuals to belong to one and the same species. The present article seeks to establish how Severus understood the relation between the account of being and the hypostases. It makes the case that he equated hypostases with hypostatic properties, thus foreshadowing the Trinitarian theology of Damian of Alexandria.<sup>1</sup>

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In the year 451 the Council of Chalcedon decreed that the incarnated Word should be understood as two natures in one hypostasis. It did not, however, state clearly what was meant by these terms. Thus the suspicion could arise that it was merely a thinly disguised restatement of the heretical views of Nestorius and that the two natures were two independent beings whereas the one hypostasis indicated merely a loose connection between them. The opponents of Chalcedon insisted that such a scenario could only be avoided if the incarnated Word was conceived of as a single nature and a single hypostasis. Their battlecry was "one nature of the Word incarnate", a formula that had been used by Cyril of Alexandria. The defenders of Chalcedon were slow to respond. The first serious counterattack was launched only in the early sixth century. At that time John of Caesarea, a teacher of grammar from Palestine, developed an innovative conceptual framework, which raised the ire of the anti-Chalcedonian faction. Their leader, Patriarch Severus of Antioch, wrote a voluminous treatise *Against the Impious Grammarian*.<sup>2</sup> The

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<sup>2</sup> On Severus' biography see P. Allen and C.T.R. Hayward, *Severus of Antioch* (London–New York, 2004), esp. 1–30. The treatise *Against the Impious Grammarian* has been edited and translated into Latin by J. Lebon: *Severi Antiocheni liber contra impium grammaticum, oratio prima et secunda: textus*, ed. J. Lebon (CSCO, 111. Scriptores Syri, 58; Paris, 1938); *Severi Antiocheni liber contra impium grammaticum, oratio prima et orationis secundae quae supersunt: versio*, tr. J. Lebon (CSCO, 112. Scriptores Syri, 59; Leuven, 1938). See also the insightful comments on Severus' use of Patristic proof texts, which make up the bulk of the treatise, by Y. Moss, "Packed with Patristic Testimonies": Severus of Antioch and the Reinvention of the Church Fathers', in B. Bitton-Ashkelony and L. Perrone (eds), *Between Personal and Institutional Religion. Self, Doctrine, and Practice in Late Antique Eastern Christianity* (Turnhout, 2013), 227–250.

seventeenth chapter of the second book contains Severus' most substantial counterarguments. It will be the focus of the following discussion.<sup>3</sup> Before setting out his own point of view Severus quotes a lengthy passage from John's work.

The Grammarian: "Thus where the Fathers use 'nature' alone without adding 'of the divine Word' they mean substance, and they say that there are two substances in Christ. For they know that he is consubstantial with the Father and with us in different respects." And again: "Thus when he said 'one nature of the divine Word', he lets us think of him as one of the Trinity, which is the hypostatic person of the Word, him who is consubstantial with the Father and possesses the same substance as his genitor. But when he added 'incarnate in a flesh endowed with soul and mind', he teaches that in the divine Word there is the commonality of the whole substance of the human beings, not a characteristic human being or a distinct person, but that which appears commonly in any human being, which is substance. For every human being is flesh endowed with a rational and intellectual soul. Therefore, in one person of the holy Trinity, which is the divine Word, he achieved the salvation of all human beings through union. Thus the divine Word is recognised as inhumanated in two natures, that is, substances. For he has in himself the substance of divinity and he also has in himself the substance of humanity."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Severus' treatise has not been the subject of sustained scholarly research. If authors have studied it at all they have tended to focus on the first chapters of the second book where Severus declares that the terms nature and hypostasis are synonymous. See J. Lebon, *Le monophysisme sévérien. Étude historique, littéraire et théologique sur la résistance monophysite au concile de Chalcedoine jusqu'à la constitution de l'église Jacobite* (Universitas Catholica Lovaniensis. Dissertationes, 2.4; Leuven, 1909), 242–280; and L.R. Wickham, 'Severus on the Trinity', *Studia patristica* 24 (1993), 360–372, who focuses in the main on homilies where Severus makes unexceptional statements. R.C. Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies: Severus of Antioch, Philoxenus of Mabbug and Jacob of Sarug* (Oxford Theological Monographs; Oxford, 1976), does not concern itself with Trinitarian theology. The discussion of Severus' theological position in A. Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche, 2/2: Die Kirche von Konstantinopel im 6. Jahrhundert* (Freiburg–Basel–Wien, 1989), 54–82, is very superficial and shows no awareness of conceptual issues.

<sup>4</sup> Severus, *Against the Impious Grammarian*, II.17, ed. Lebon, 145.18–146.6, tr. Lebon, 113: *Grammaticus: "Igitur ubi patres "naturam" singulariter ponunt, quin "Dei Verbi" addant, tunc substantiam significant, duasque naturas dicunt esse in Christo: norunt enim eum secundum aliud atque aliud et Patri et nobis consubstantialiam."* *Rursusque: "Igitur, cum dixit "unam naturam Dei Verbi", unum illum de Trinitate intelligendum praebebat, qui est hypostatica persona Verbi, eum qui Patri consubstantialis est, utpote eandem genitoris sui substantiam possidens. Cum autem addidit "incarnatum carne anima menteque praedita", docet in Deo Verbo esse id, quod commune est, totius substantiae hominum, non hominem signatum et personam distinctam ponens, sed id quod communiter in quolibet homine apparet, quod est substantia. Omnis enim homo est caro anima rationabili et intelligente animata. Igitur, in una persona sanctae Trinitatis, quae est, Deus Verbum, salutem omnium hominum per unionem ponit. Proinde in duabus naturis, id est, substantiis agnoscitur Deus Verbum inhumanatus: habetur enim in ipso substantia divinitatis, habetur autem in ipso etiam substantia humanitatis."* The English translation of this and the following passages was checked by John Watt against the Syriac original.

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In this passage John offers an interpretation of Cyril's formula "one nature of the Word incarnate" that brings it in line with Chalcedonian Christology. He makes a distinction between the noun "nature" and the attribute "of the Word", claiming that the former denotes the common divine nature whereas the latter denotes the hypostasis in which this nature is seen. In a second step he then claims that the "flesh endowed with soul and mind" is the common human nature, which is found in any human being. In this case he specifies that the flesh is not a separate hypostasis as this would endanger the unity of Christ. This point is discussed at greater length elsewhere in the text. There John denies the flesh all characteristic idioms because according to Cappadocian teaching a nature endowed with such idioms automatically becomes a hypostasis.<sup>5</sup> Here he is primarily interested in the natures themselves, which he prefers to call substances, because the latter term permits him to create a more forceful argument. It was universally agreed that the incarnated Word was consubstantial both with the other divine persons and with all human beings. Moreover, the Cappadocians whose orthodoxy was beyond doubt had taught that the hypostases are consubstantial because they have a common substance. Thus John can claim that the twofold consubstantiality presupposes the existence of two substances in the incarnated Word. Moreover, again following the Cappadocians, he defines "substance" as the "account of being", that is, the set of properties that are found in all members of a species. The anti-Chalcedonians could not deny that the incarnated Word contained both sets of properties. Indeed, they made the same point when they spoke of a "difference in natural property".<sup>6</sup> By employing the term "substance" instead, John could insinuate that "natural property" was nothing but "nature", since his adversaries accepted that the Cappadocians had used the terms "nature" and "substance" interchangeably.<sup>7</sup> Unsurprisingly Severus rejects John's interpretation.

The God-clothed teachers of the mysteries of the Church say that the union is a composition of the flesh, which is evidently endowed with a rational soul, with the Word, following the inspired words of the Gospel, which proclaims clearly: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" – which union they also call incarnation and inhumanation and composition, in order that the divine Word, one hypostasis, united itself hypostatically with one particular flesh endowed with a rational and intellectual soul from the God-bearer Mary.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus*, 2/2, 68–69; and B. Gleede, *The Development of the Term ἐννπόστατον from Origen to John of Damascus* (Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae, 113; Leiden–Boston, 2012), 54.

<sup>6</sup> See e.g. H. van Loon, *The Dyophysite Christology of Cyril of Alexandria* (Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae, 96; Leiden–Boston, 2009), 227.

<sup>7</sup> See Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus*, 2/2, 56–63.

<sup>8</sup> Severus, *Against the Impious Grammarian*, II.17, ed. Lebon, 147.27–148.6, tr. Lebon, 115: *Unionem deiferi mystagogi Ecclesiae coniunctionem carnis, evidenter rationabiliter animatae ad Deum Verbum esse*

Here Severus reiterates the Monophysite position that the terms “nature” and “hypostasis” are synonymous and that the “one nature” refers to a concretely existing individual, the Word. Moreover, he claims that the flesh, too, would have been a particular nature or hypostasis if it had not been assumed by the Word at the very moment of its coming-to-be. This clarification became necessary because Severus had to justify the Monophysite formula “from two natures”. Since in both cases the term nature appeared, he had to treat Word and flesh exactly alike.<sup>9</sup> Having thus set out his own position he proceeds to refute John’s argument:

If you say, my good man, that you consider the one Christ to be “two united and indivisible natures”, that is, two substances according to the generic signification and, as you have said, according to that **which commonly appears in every human being**, ... and you consider the whole divinity, **which appears in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit**, to be one nature – for this is commonality –, and you finally consider the whole humanity when understood generically to be one nature, but the incarnation and composition is the union of inhumanation, how do you escape laughter and a godlessness that exceeds all sense, namely the conclusion that arises from these indecent words and thoughts, that the Holy Trinity has incarnated in the whole humanity?<sup>10</sup>

Here Severus declares that the union of two substances, which was proposed by John, results in the absurd scenario that all divine persons become incarnate in all human beings. It is evident that this scenario is the exact counterpart of Severus’ own position where one divine individual is united with one human individual. It is alleged that “substance” signifies the collective of all members of a species. The common account of being is not considered at all, despite the fact that Severus uses the phrases “appearing in all human beings” and “appearing in the Father and the

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*dicunt, sequentes vocem inspiratam evangelii manifesto clamantem: “Verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis” – quam unionem etiam incarnationem et inhumanationem et compositionem vocant, quatenus Deus Verbum, una hypostasis, unam particularemque carnem rationabiliter et sapienter animatam, ex deipara Maria ortam sibi hypostatice univit.*

<sup>9</sup> This aspect of Severus’ Trinitarian theology is discussed in J. Zachhuber, ‘Individuality and the Theological Debate about “Hypostasis”’, in A. Torrance, J. Zachhuber (eds), *Individuality in Late Antiquity* (Farnham– Burlington, VT, 2014), 91–110, esp. 105–106.

<sup>10</sup> Severus, *Against the Impious Grammarian*, II.17, ed. Lebon, 150.7-20, tr. Lebon, 117: *Si vero dicas, o bone, te asserere unum Christum esse “duas naturas unitas et individuas”, id est, duas substantias secundum genericam significationem atque, ut dixisti, secundum id, quod communiter in omnibus hominibus apparet, ... et si unam quidem naturam intelligas communiter totam divinitatem, quae in Patre et Filio et Spiritu sancto apparet, - nam haec est communitas -, rursus autem unam naturam censeas esse totam humanitatem generice sumptam; et tandem si incarnatio et compositio sit unio inhumanationis: quomodo effugies risum et impietatem omnem sensum excedentem, scilicet conclusionem ex istis verbis et cogitationibus indecoris colligendam, nempe sanctam Trinitatem cum tota humanitate incarnatum esse?*

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Son and the Holy Spirit”, which were traditionally used to describe the immanent universal. Another passage, which has survived in the original Greek, shows how strong Severus’ focus on concrete individuals is:

Ἡμεῖς ἐκ δύο φύσεων λέγοντες τὸν Ἐμμανουὴλ οὐκ οὐσίας νοοῦμεν τὰς φύσεις, τὰς τῆς κοινότητος δηλωτικὰς καὶ πολλῶν ὑποστάσεων περιεκτικὰς, ἀλλὰ τὴν μίαν ὑπόστασιν τοῦ Λόγου καὶ τὴν μίαν σάρκα τὴν ἐνψυχωμένην νοερῶς ἐξ ὧν ἀτρέπτως συνενήνεκται εἰς ἓν καὶ συντέθεται.<sup>11</sup>

When we say that the Emmanuel is from two natures we do not mean by natures the substances that are indicative of the commonality and comprehensive of many hypostases, but the one hypostasis of the Word and the one flesh endowed with soul and mind from which he has been brought together and composed into one without suffering change.

Here, too, the commonality is not the common account of being but rather the collective of all members of a species. As such it is not juxtaposed with the bundle of accidents but with an individual member of the species.

The refutation of John’s arguments was not the first text in which Severus had expressed such a view. Therefore John’s treatise already contains a response to it:

Πρὸς τοὺς λέγοντας· εἴ φατε τὸν Χριστὸν δύο ἔχειν οὐσίας, πάντως ἡ ἀγία τριάς παῖσαν σεσάρκωται τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα. Ταῦτα τῶν ἐναντίων ὑπάρχει τὰ προβλήματα. Οἶοντα γὰρ ἴσως μεριστὴν εἶναι τὴν τῆς θεότητος οὐσίαν, καὶ τὸ μὲν αὐτῆς ἐν πατρὶ θεωρεῖσθαι, τὸ δὲ ἐν υἱῷ, τὸ δὲ ἐν ἀγίῳ πνεύματι, ὡς ἐκάστης ὑποστάσεως ἐκ μέρους, ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἐν πασι τοῖς τῆς θεότητος ιδιώμασι γνωριζομένης. Ἡμεῖς δὲ οὐκ εἰς τοσοῦτον ἀσεβείας ἠλάσαμεν, ὡς μερισμὸν ἠγεῖσθαι καὶ κατατομὴν περὶ τὴν θείαν ὑπάρχειν οὐσίαν, ἀλλὰ φαμεν ἐκάστην χαρακτηριστικὴν ὑπόστασιν ἀνελλιπῶς τὰ τῆς θεότητος ἔχειν γνωρίσματα, τὸ ἀγαθὸν τὸ δημιουργικὸν καὶ ὅσα περὶ τὴν ἄκτιστον φύσιν ὑπάρχει. Οὕτω γὰρ καὶ ὁμοούσιον τὴν τριάδα φαμέν, ὡς τῆς αὐτῆς οὐσίας ὀλοτελῶς ἐν τρισὶ προσώποις γνωριζομένης.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *Diversorum postchalcedonensium auctorum collectanea*, I. *Pamphili Opus*, ed. J. H. Declerck, *Eustathii Monachi opus*, ed. P. Allen (Corpus Christianorum. Series graeca, 19; Turnhout–Leuven, 1989), 428–429.473–478.

<sup>12</sup> John of Caesarea, *Apologia concilii Chalcedonensis*, ed. M. Richard, *Iohannis Caesariensis presbyteri et grammatici opera quae supersunt* (Corpus Christianorum. Series Graeca, 1; Turnhout, 1977), 40.33–46.



Against those who say: “If you say that Christ has two substances, then the holy Trinity is inevitably become incarnate in the whole humanity.” These are the problems of the adversaries. For they think perhaps that the substance of the divinity can be broken up into parts, and that one part of it is seen in the Father, another in the Son and yet another in the Holy Spirit, so that each hypostasis is recognised partially but not in all idioms of the divinity. We, however, are not driven to such a degree of ungodliness that we consider a partition and division of the divine substance, but say that each characteristic hypostasis has the marks of the divinity without any of them lacking, namely goodness, creativity and whatever exists about the uncreated nature. For thus we also say that the Trinity is consubstantial, since the same substance is recognised entirely in three persons.<sup>13</sup>

In this passage John engages with Severus’ main argument against his interpretation of nature as substance, namely that the incarnation would then unite the whole Trinity with the entire human race. He insinuates that Severus can only come to this conclusion because he has a wrong understanding of substance. According to him Severus wishes to divide the account of being and distribute its constituent elements among the different members of a species. In the case of the human being this would mean a fragmentation of the definition “rational mortal animal receptive of thought and knowledge”, with the result that the quality “rational” would be found in one human being and the quality “mortal” in another. This is a rather curious argument. One would have expected John to accuse Severus of dividing the common human substance into particular substances. The reason for this shift from the extensional to the intensional meaning of substance may well be that John himself had no clear idea of how a substance can appear in a multitude of beings and yet be undivided.

In his response Severus can rightly claim that he has never harboured such a notion. He insists that the Word had the complete account of divinity and the flesh had the complete account of humanity but that they were nevertheless particular natures. He must, however, have felt that it was not enough simply to state his position because he then proceeds to explain how it can be that each member of a species has the same account of being. Significantly, he does in this instance not fall back on his customary strategy to replace substance as the account of being with substance as the sum total of all individuals belonging to a species. Instead he attempts to accord the intensional meaning of the term a place in his conceptual framework.

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<sup>13</sup> For the Syriac text see Severus, *Against the Impious Grammarian*, II.17, ed. Lebon, 152, tr. Lebon, 119.



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Peter participates in the commonality of humanity and substance, which is rationality, mortality, and receptiveness of thought and knowledge, and in similar fashion Paul and John who are distinct from one another and in no way confused with one another, are themselves, too, **participating in the commonality of substance, that is, they are rational and mortal and receptive of thought and knowledge.**<sup>14</sup>

In this passage Severus declares that all members of a species participate in the same account of being and are in this sense one. In a second step he then tries to establish how this new understanding of substance relates to his customary one. He comes back to this problem several times, which shows clearly that he did not find it easy to formulate an answer.

In us humanity, the whole substance encompasses many hypostases, that is, those of Peter and of Paul and of John and of all the others, but Peter and Paul and John are hypostases, which **participate in the same substance in equal fashion** – for each one of them participates in humanity perfectly and without diminution and is a human being, and is distinguished through his own characteristic and is joined with the consubstantial hypostases through absolute similitude, without there being a diversity of genus and of what is common, but **he himself is not the whole substance and humanity, which encompasses each one of the hypostases.**<sup>15</sup>

Here Severus juxtaposes two different meanings of substance. He claims that Peter participates in the whole substance – insofar as he bears in himself all constituent elements of the account of being, just as all other human beings do – but that he is not the whole substance – insofar as he is not the sum total of all individuals that have the same account of being but only one of them.

This raises the question: how does Severus conceive of the relationship between hypostasis and substance as the common account of being? Since for him hypostases are concrete beings one

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<sup>14</sup> Severus, *Against the Impious Grammarian*, II.17, ed. Lebon, 156.15-21, tr. Lebon, 122: *Petrus particeps est huius, quod commune est, humanitatis et substantiae, quod est, rationalitas, mortalitas, habilitas ad mentem scientiamque recipiendum; similiter est Paulus et Iohannes, singularibus characteribus distincti minimeque inter se confusi, particeps et ipsi sunt huius, quod commune est, substantiae, id est, rationabiles et mortales et recipiendae mentis atque scientiae capaces sunt.*

<sup>15</sup> Severus, *Against the Impious Grammarian*, II.17, ed. Lebon, 161.6-17, tr. Lebon, 125–126: *Apud nos humanitas tota substantia comprehendit multas hypostases, nempe Petri et Pauli et Iohannis ceterorumque omnium, Petrus autem et Paulus et Iohannes hypostases sunt ipsam substantiam aequae participantes – nam unusquisque eorum perfecte et absque imminutione humanitatem participat et est homo, proprioque characterem distinguitur et cum consubstantialibus hypostasibus coniungitur absoluta similitudine et carentia diversitatis generis et huius, quod commune est, sed ipse non est tota substantia et humanitas, quae unamquamque ex hypostasibus comprehendit.*

might think that he considers them to be primary substances in the Aristotelian sense.<sup>16</sup> If that were the case he would recognise in the divinity one common substance and three particular substances. Such a position was indeed held by some Monophysites in the later sixth century. They were called “tetradites” because they introduced a fourth element into the Trinity, a position that was manifestly heretical.<sup>17</sup> Yet analysis of three further arguments suggests that Severus is not a “tetradite” *avant la lettre*. The first of these arguments takes as its starting point Basil’s statement in the *Letter to Terentius* that “each one of us participates in being through the common account of substance”, ἕκαστος γὰρ ἡμῶν καὶ τῷ κοινῷ τῆς οὐσίας λόγῳ τοῦ εἶναι μετέχει.<sup>18</sup> Severus offers the following interpretation.

Each of us participates in the common humanity and **the one substance above all**, and is one man and one hypostasis. But he will not be called, because he participates in the substance, a substance and not a hypostasis. For the latter is the participant whereas the former is the participated.<sup>19</sup>

Here Severus defines “substance” as the common account of being. He contends that a hypostasis cannot be called substance because it merely participates in this substance. It is evident that what in Basil’s letter had been a manner of speech has taken on a precise meaning in Severus’ Trinitarian theology. He concludes from it that a hypostasis *qua* hypostasis does not have substantial component. It is not difficult to see why he took this path. If he had admitted that the hypostasis contained a substantial component, he would have effectively proved John’s case that all hypostases contain the same account of being and are in this sense one substance. Severus who did not clearly distinguish between the intensional and extensional meanings of “substance” could not draw such a conclusion because for him it would have meant that the entire Trinity became incarnate in the entire human race. Therefore, he had to locate substance as the common account of being outside the hypostasis, or rather “above” it. This was a momentous step since it amounted

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. J. Zachhuber, ‘Individuum und Individualität in den theologischen Debatten der Spätantike’, in W. Gräß, L. Charbonnier (eds), *Individualität. Genese und Konzeption einer Leitkategorie humaner Selbsteutung* (Berlin, 2012), 13–49, esp. 38–43.

<sup>17</sup> On the ‘tetradites’ see D. Krausmüller, ‘Under the Spell of John Philoponus: How Chalcedonian Theologians of the Late Patristic Period Attempted to Safeguard the Oneness of God’, *Journal of Theological Studies* 68 (2017), 625–649, esp. 641–643. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jts/flx075>

<sup>18</sup> Basil, *Epistula* 214.4, ed. Y. Courtonne, *Saint Basile, Lettres*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1961), 205–206.9–10.

<sup>19</sup> Severus, *Against the Impious Grammarian*, II.23, ed. Lebon, 191.25–192.1, tr. Lebon, 149: *Unusquisque nostrum participat communem humanitatem unamque omnibus superiorem substantiam, et est unus homo unaque hypostasis. Attamen, non ideoque quia substantiam participat, non est hypostasis sed substantia vocandus est: ipse enim participat, ille autem participari potest*. Quoted in Peter of Callinicum, *Against Damian*, III.32, tr. R. Y. Ebied, A. van Roey, L. R. Wickham, *Petri Callinicensis patriarchae Antiocheni tractatus contra Damianum*, III: *Libri tertii capita XX–XXXIV* (Corpus Christianorum, Series Graeca, 35; Turnhout, 1998), 438.99–103.

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to a complete rejection of the Cappadocian immanent universal, which was now replaced by an *ante rem* universal. The obvious consequence of such a position is that the hypostasis *qua* hypostasis is nothing but the characteristic idioms that mark out the individual. That Severus is indeed inching towards such a solution can be seen from the following argument.

For if each of the hypostases be deemed to be the whole substance because it participates in the commonality of the substance, our reasoning about substance and hypostasis will be muddled and ruined and there will be nothing to mark the divergence between the two; the former will not be indicative of what which is common and the latter will not be indicative of what which is proper.<sup>20</sup>

Here, too, the substantial and hypostatic components are strictly separated from one another in order to preclude the solution that John had offered. As a consequence, hypostasis is equated with a property or a set of properties, which only becomes substantial through participation in a substance that is external to it. This raises the question: what is then the ontological status of properties? A third argument suggests an answer. There Severus interprets a passage in John Chrysostom's seventy-fourth homily on the Gospel of John. Chrysostom paraphrases Christ's words in John 14:8: "He who has seen me, has seen the Father", ὁ ἑώρακῶς ἐμὲ ἑώρακε τὸν Πατέρα, as "wishing to show the consubstantiality, he said: 'He who knows my substance, knows also that of the Father'", τὸ ὁμοούσιον παραστῆσαι βουλόμενος εἶπεν· ὁ τὴν ἐμὴν οὐσίαν εἰδῶς οἶδε καὶ τὴν τοῦ Πατρὸς.<sup>21</sup> Severus takes this statement as the starting point for a lengthy explanation:

Does it seem to you that he who says this cuts asunder the substance of the Father and the Son, or that he shows that every hypostasis is **in the substance of the divinity**, when it has its concrete property in itself, and that because it is **in no way different** from consubstantial hypostases, it is said to **participate with them in one and the same substance**, because it is **one substance above all hypostases of the same genus**? ... And we must also recognise another thing: that fatherhood, i.e. ingeneracy, or generacy, or procession are not empty names and "relationships bereft of realities" (as Gregory the Theologian says somewhere) but the fatherhood which exists in the Godhead, so that God is Father, and the sonship or generacy which exists in the Godhead, so that God is Son or

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<sup>20</sup> The original is lost. Quoted in Peter of Callinicum, *Against Damian*, III.1, tr. R. Y. Ebied, A. van Roey and L. R. Wickham, *Petri Callinicensis patriarchae Antiocheni tractatus contra Damianum*, II: *Libri tertii capita I-XIX* (Corpus Christianorum, Series Graeca, 32; Turnhout, 1996), 46.54–58.

<sup>21</sup> John Chrysostom, *In Johannem homiliae*, 74, PG, 59, 401.19–21.

offspring and likewise the procession which exists in the Godhead, so that the Holy Ghost is God proceeding.<sup>22</sup>

Here we encounter all the usual elements of Severus' Trinitarian theology. The hypostases are consubstantial because they are 'in' the substance and participate in the substance, two statements that for Severus evidently have the same meaning. The participated substance is 'above' the hypostases and unifies them because it is one. Then, however, Severus adds a further statement about the properties of the three divine persons. He declares that fatherhood, sonship and procession are 'in' the divinity, which in his conceptual framework means that they participate in it. What constitutes God the Father is the participation of the property "fatherhood" in the common account of being, and the same applies to God the Son and God the Spirit. It is evident that such a model is only viable if the properties themselves are hypostases. Severus feels justified to draw this conclusion because Gregory of Nazianzus had insisted that the properties were not empty names but had a reality of their own.<sup>23</sup>

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There can be no doubt that Severus did not realise that he had stripped the hypostases of their substantial component. Indeed, sometimes he fails to make a clear distinction between substance as the collective of hypostases and substance as the common account of being. Yet this does not mean that his readers' thinking was equally confused. The last three passages that we have discussed were quoted by Patriarch Damian of Alexandria in a treatise called *Many-Lined Letter*.<sup>24</sup> Damian, too, identifies the hypostases with the hypostatic properties and claims that the hypostases only become substantial through participation in the common account of being.<sup>25</sup> In

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<sup>22</sup> Severus, *Against the Impious Grammarian*, II.22, ed. Lebon, 170.9-171.4, tr. Lebon, 133: *Numquid ergo qui haec dicit tibi videtur Patris et Filii substantiam dissecare, aut ostendere omnem hypostasim esse in divinitatis substantia, cum habeat concretam in se proprietatem suam, et propterea quod ad consubstantiales hypostases nullam differentiam habeat, eam dici cum illis unam eandemque substantiam participare, quia una est supra omnes homogeneas hypostases substantia? ... Aliud autem etiam sciendum est: paternitas sive innascibilitas et generatio et processio non sunt inania nomina neque relations rebus orbatae, ut alicubi dicit Gregorius theologus, sed paternitas naturaliter existens in divinitate, ita ut sit Pater Deus, et filiatio seu generatio naturaliter existens in divinitate, ita ut sit Filius seu Proles Deus, itemque processio naturaliter existens in divinitate, ita ut sit Deus Procedens, Spiritus sanctus. Quoted in Peter of Callinicum, *Against Damian*, III.31, tr. Ebied, van Roey and Wickham, *Petri Callinicensis*, III, 390.205–211.*

<sup>23</sup> The exact phrase does not seem to have a counterpart in Gregory of Nazianzus' oeuvre. See, however, Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio VI: De pace*, PG 35, col. 749, col. 1072.

<sup>24</sup> R. Y. Ebied, A. van Roey and L. R. Wickham, *Petri Callinicensis patriarchae Antiocheni tractatus contra Damianum*, I: *Quae supersunt libri secundi* (Corpus Christianorum, Series Graeca, 29; Turnhout, 1994), introduction, xvii.

<sup>25</sup> Ebied, van Roey and Wickham, *Petri Callinicensis*, I, introduction, xxii–xxiii.

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order to make his case he has collected a substantial number of proof texts from theological writings of the fourth and fifth centuries, in particular the orations of Gregory of Nazianzus, which seem to imply equation of hypostasis with property.<sup>26</sup> Yet there can be no doubt that Severus was his main source of inspiration because all passages that introduce the crucial concept of participation are taken from the treatise *Against the Impious Grammarian*.<sup>27</sup> Damian could with some justification say that he had merely pulled together the different elements of Severus' speculation and drawn out their implications.

This does not mean that Severus and Damian engaged in the same discourse. As we have seen Severus needed to get rid of the immanent universal because he thought that if he did not do so the entire Trinity would become incarnate in the entire human race. This led him to define the hypostases as properties because only they were entirely different from each other. Damian's theological initiative was directed against Tritheism, the belief that Father, Son and Spirit were not only three hypostases but also three particular substances and that the common substance was a concept that had no existence outside the human mind and thus did not introduce a fourth component into the Trinity.<sup>28</sup> Damian's predecessor as patriarch of Antioch, Theodosius, had written a treatise against the Tritheists in which he declared that one could call Father, Son and Spirit each "a certain substance" because the Fathers, too, had used this term but that one must not speak of three substances because the substance of Father, Son and Spirit taken together was only one.<sup>29</sup> Such a solution, however, could not satisfy the Tritheists. As John Philoponus pointed out, beings cannot be both united and differentiated at the same ontological level.<sup>30</sup> Damian must have felt that a more radical solution was needed, which addressed these criticisms.

Thus, then, we should in patristic fashion profess each as God and we shall not be censured justly for Tritheism, because there is not division *qua* God but *qua* Father, Son and Holy Ghost. But those who enumerate *qua* God and call each of them "God himself",

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<sup>26</sup> Ebied, van Roey and Wickham, *Petri Callinicensis*, I, introduction, xxiii–xxiv.

<sup>27</sup> A list of the quotations from Severus' treatise against John of Caesarea can be found in S. Ebied, 'Quotations from the Works of St. Severus in Peter of Callinicus' magnum opus "Contra Damianum"', in J. D'Alton, Y.N. Nessim (eds), *Severus of Antioch: his life and times* (Texts and Studies in Eastern Christianity, 7; Leiden–Boston, 2016), 65–123.

<sup>28</sup> Ebied, van Roey and Wickham, *Petri Callinicensis*, I, introduction, xv–xvi.

<sup>29</sup> The text is edited and discussed in A. van Roey and P. Allen, *Monophysite Texts of the Sixth Century, edited, translated and annotated* (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta, 56; Leuven, 1994), 126–140.

<sup>30</sup> John Philoponus, *Arbiter*, quoted in John of Damascus, *Liber de haeresibus*, 83 addit., ed. B. Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. 3 (Patristische Texte und Studien, 17; Berlin–New York, 1975), 56.

and do not recognise the person in its own concept as one thing and God as another, cannot escape the charge of being Tritheists.<sup>31</sup>

This statement is an implicit correction of Theodosius' position. Damian claims that when one accepts that a hypostasis is at the same time a substance one has to speak of three different substances. In order to avoid this conclusion, he makes a clear distinction between the one substance and the person "in its own concept", that is, the property. This is a neat solution to the problem.<sup>32</sup> It has only one drawback: it cannot be reconciled with the mainstream view that the hypostasis had a substantial component. As a consequence, Peter of Callinicum, the patriarch of Antioch, declares Damian to be a heretic.<sup>33</sup> This does not, however, mean that Peter has found a better way to counter the assertions of the Tritheists. He merely piles up proof texts from the Fathers, which show that hypostasis cannot be reduced to property, without addressing the question whether the substances in the hypostases could be counted or not.<sup>34</sup> His engagement with Damian's conceptual framework is also quite unsatisfactory. He defines the common substance not as the account of being but as the sum total of all hypostases and can thus arrive at the absurd conclusion that each divine hypostasis would participate in the sum total of all hypostases.<sup>35</sup> While there can be no doubt that Damian took the concept of participation from Severus, he was much more aware of the problems inherent in such a model. This is evident from the following passage:

So when we join the common to the property and say "God the Father", we do not simply indicate only the hypostasis by the terms, but the substantial hypostasis: by saying "God" we make plain the substance and the common; by the denomination "Father" we indicate the hypostasis and the properness of the person, so that the substance will never be non-hypostatic, nor will there be found an unsubstantial hypostasis, except when as an invention of our mind the enquiring reason asks what each of them is in its own concept as has often been proved.... So God the Father is both participant and participated, i.e. is a substantial hypostasis and not simply only an indication of a hypostasis. For this is the

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<sup>31</sup> Peter of Callinicum, *Against Damian*, III.36, tr. R. Y. Ebied, A. van Roey and L. R. Wickham, *Petri Callinicensis patriarchae Antiocheni tractatus contra Damianum*, IV: *Libri tertii capita XXXV-L, et addendum libro secundo* (Corpus Christianorum, Series Graeca, 54; Turnhout, 2003), 38.35–40.

<sup>32</sup> For a discussion of Damian's Trinitarian theology see L. Wickham, 'Schism and reconciliation in a sixth-century Trinitarian dispute: Damian of Alexandria and Peter of Callinicus on "properties, rôles, and relations"', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 8 (2008), 3–15.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14742250701841673>

<sup>33</sup> Ebied, van Roey and Wickham, *Petri Callinicensis*, I, introduction, xxi.

<sup>34</sup> Ebied, van Roey and Wickham, *Petri Callinicensis*, I, introduction, xxvi.

<sup>35</sup> Peter of Callinicum, *Against Damian*, III.34, tr. Ebied, van Roey and Wickham, III, 506.96–100.

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cause of our opponents' error, because they do not consent, or do not want, to separate hypostasis from substance but confuse their meanings and are thereby confused.<sup>36</sup>

Here Damian insists that although one can distinguish in thought between hypostasis and substance a hypostasis is in reality never without a substantial component. Thus he seeks to avoid the impression that the Trinity consists of two different elements.

Damian also knows quite well that the term participation can be misunderstood because traditionally human beings were said to participate in the divinity. In order to defend himself against the accusation that he regards the properties as creatures he emphasises that participation in the Trinity is categorically different from participation in the created order.

When we say that the hypostasis participates in the substance we do not understand this in the same sense (far from it!) as when it is said about us that we are "participating in" the divine nature but according to the concept befitting a substantial hypostasis.<sup>37</sup>

Yet it needs to be admitted that his argument is not entirely successful. In one passage he offers a Platonising description of the order of being.

Hence, then, if we proceed in an order from the "one" to those in it and thence descend to creatures, the more we descend the more manifold becomes the impress on our minds until, attaining to ultimate division, we halt at plurality; and if we thence ascend again, we find nothing unique, even though in the upward course plurality is contracted gradually until in our returning we again reach the truly "one" from whom all that are have their existence.<sup>38</sup>

This statement suggests that the triad of Father, Son and Spirit is of a lower ontological order than the one divine nature and takes its place halfway between God and creation.

Damian's model of the Trinity was ultimately rejected by all Monophysite churches.<sup>39</sup> As a consequence, his writings are lost and all we have is a few passages, which Peter of Callinicum quoted in order to refute them. Yet it can be argued that his model was not only the only real alternative to the Tritheist solution but also the most faithful adaptation of Severus' Trinitarian theology.

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<sup>36</sup> Peter of Callinicum, *Against Damian*, III.32, tr. Ebied, van Roey and Wickham, III, 430–432.20–33.

<sup>37</sup> Peter of Callinicum, *Against Damian*, III.32, tr. Ebied, van Roey and Wickham, IV, 38.31–35.

<sup>38</sup> Peter of Callinicum, *Against Damian*, III.32, tr. Ebied, van Roey and Wickham, IV, 204.428–434.

<sup>39</sup> Ebied, van Roey and Wickham, *Petri Callinicensis*, I, introduction, xxi.



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To conclude: In his treatise *Against the Impious Grammarian* Severus of Antioch rejects the notion of an immanent universal. He takes this step because he does not distinguish clearly enough between the intensional and the extensional meanings of substance. According to him substance is the sum total of all hypostases. As a consequence the human and divine components in the incarnated Word cannot be defined as substances because then the entire Trinity would have become incarnate in the entire human race. Yet he cannot simply suppress the intensional meaning of substance because he has to explain what causes individuals to belong to one and the same species. Against tradition he declares that hypostases are to be equated with properties and further asserts that the properties gain their substantial component through participation in a common substance that is located “above” the hypostases and thus different from them. Severus himself was undoubtedly unaware of the implications of his model. Yet this does not mean that his readers could not recognise them. In the second half of the sixth century, the Monophysite patriarch Damian of Alexandria engaged in a controversy with the tritheists who defined the Trinity as three particular substances and declared that the common substance was a mental construct. In his refutation Damian uses passages from the treatise *Against the Impious Grammarian* as proof texts. Following Severus, he identifies the hypostases with the properties and claims that the properties participate in the one single substance. This enables him to eliminate the particular substances and to assert the reality of the common substance without multiplying the constituent elements of the Trinity.