Biblical Grounding for the Christology of the Councils

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I. INTRODUCTION

When theologians take up the crucial catechetical task of teaching about Jesus Christ, what principle of ordering should they follow? Which sub-topics within this rich field should be taught first, which ones postponed until later, and under what overarching categories should they all be gathered? In this article, I would like to commend one particular organizational schema for introducing Christology to students, and then demonstrate the advantages of that schema by offering a brief example of its key points. The method I recommend is this: follow the leading ideas of the ecumenical councils of the early church and then support them with biblical argumentation. Conciliar Christology is thus the framework for teaching Christology, with biblical material brought in to fill it out.

It may seem odd for an evangelical theologian committed to the final authority of Scripture alone (*sola scriptura*) to give such strategic organizational importance to the decisions of the early church, or in short, to tradition. Indeed, several presuppositions are at work here to make such a decision possible. Three of them are worth mentioning explicitly. The first presupposition is that in this case, content is sovereign over form so that biblical content in post-biblical or church-traditional form remains biblical. This is a wide-ranging principle, permitting not only biblical translation (biblical content in a new receptor language) but also doctrinal paraphrase (biblical content in different terminology, idiom, and conceptualities). Not just the words, but even "the *sense* of Scripture is Scripture," as B. B. Warfield once wrote, defending the proposition that

the doctrine of the Trinity was truly biblical.[1] The *Westminster Confession of Faith*, likewise, consistently assumes throughout what it announces as a principle in section six: "The whole counsel of God... is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture," and to this revealed doctrine which is either explicit (set down in Scripture) or implicit ("by good and necessary consequence deduced"), "nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men."[2]

The second presupposition is that Scripture does not mandate any particular organizational scheme for teaching the truths of Christology, so the church and its theologians are not only permitted but even required to shape their teaching as seems best to them. From this it follows that there may be multiple possible and permissible ways to organize the subject matter, and that as long as the material is all present, it is probably not productive to fret about the sequence of the material. In such matters, the Protestant theologians of earlier days had a motto: *methodus est arbitraria*, "the method is a matter of choice." The late eighteenth-century theologian J.C.W. Augusti pointed out that "what the old theologians intended by this saying was by no means to give free play to a desultory license, but only to show how the order, sequence and position of the individual parts can be changed, so long as the general rules and determinants of the relationships are maintained."[3] The decision about how to handle Christology is one that must be made carefully, precisely because the format is not determined in advance by Scripture.

The third presupposition is that in this case, the church's tradition is not at odds with Scripture, but serves it well, having produced in the course of its development an organizing schema that has attained the status of a classic. That such a harmonious agreement of Scripture and tradition is possible is an option worth considering in general;[4] but to prove that it is actually the case when it comes to Christology is the substance of what will be argued in this entire article.

II. DIVINITY AND HUMANITY OF CHRIST

One of the reasons that Scripture and tradition work together so well in the realm of Christology is that the ecumenical councils pick out from

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[1]B. B. Warfield, "The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity," in *Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), II: 143. Emphasis added.

[2]See *Reformed Confessions Harmonized: With an Annotated Bibliography of Reformed Doctrinal Writings*, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Sinclair B. Ferguson (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 12.

[3]Johann Christian Wilhelm Augusti, *System der christlichen Dogmatik* (Leipzig, 1825), 29; translation mine.

[4]On this possibility, see Michael Allen and Scott Swain, *Reformed Catholicity: The Promise of Retrieval for Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015).

Scripture the two topics of the divinity and humanity of Christ and offer them as the key terms to use in instruction. These leading ideas are scriptural in the sense of being major issues within the Bible, and yet they are not the key terms offered to us by the words of Scripture itself. They loom in the background, yet there are not many passages of Scripture that single out these two factors and juxtapose them to each other in the space of a few words. In the four gospels, we could say that the divinity and humanity of Christ seem mingled together in various ways that are narratively and spiritually nourishing, but analytically unclear. Christ's divinity and humanity may be clear from the gospels, but what is also clear is that the gospels are not organized on the principle of laying out those two truths analytically.[5] They may be doing something vastly better, but they are not shaping a Christology lesson. The epistles come closer, but even when Paul gives us carefully balanced parallel statements about a duality in the work or person of Christ, there is slippage between his categories and the categories of divinity and humanity: in the key texts he describes Christ as Son of God and as Lord, or as existing in the form of God and taking the form of a servant, but never with simply his divinity or humanity as the key topics.[6] Paul is always up to more and providing categories that exceed the analytic clarity needed for Christological instruction.

In that sense, the divinity-and-humanity schema is not a prominent organizational formulation of biblical authors, and yet the deity and humanity of Christ are both presupposed and reckoned with throughout the New Testament. What the themes lack in terms of being concentrated they make up for in terms of being widespread. They are not often concise and tersely formulated, but are pervasive and decisively presupposed. So with remarkable consistency, interpreters who try to distil the elements of Christology come away from the Bible with these two themes: that Jesus Christ is divine and that Jesus Christ is human.

To see how imposing and useful these leading ideas are, consider the presentation of Christology in four systematic theologies that pride themselves not on organizing their material according to theological categories inherited from tradition, creed, or confession, but from staying very close to the explicit content of what the Bible teaches.

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[5]The Gospel of John, with its prologue's announcement of a "Word who was God ... and became flesh" may be an exception, but it is an exception that proves the rule by being the key text that exerted disproportionate formative power on patristic Christology. See T. E. Pollard, *Johannine Christology and the Early Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

[6]See for example Gordon Pee, *Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 16-20, where Pee focuses on three key Pauline texts that seem to contain Paul's fundamental ideas.

For example, R. A. Torrey's *What the Bible Teaches* (1898)[7] follows a "rigidly inductive" method, as he says on the first page. It covers "What the Bible Teaches about Jesus Christ" under the following headings: (1) His divinity; (2) his subordination to the Father; (3) his human nature; (4) his character, before moving on to discuss events from the life of Christ (his death, resurrection, ascension, and return). This Christology section takes seventy-six pages, of which the section on "the character of Jesus Christ" is by far the longest at forty-six pages. So the divinity-humanity schema is in place as the primary ordering principle, though Torrey's "careful, unbiased, systematic, thorough-going, *inductive* study"[8] also leads him to survey a mass of material under the nontraditional heading of "character." This material, some of the richest in Torrey's Christology, is nevertheless somewhat sprawling and disordered, and includes aspects of the person of Christ, aspects of his work, and in some cases divine attributes that he demonstrated in the flesh. In this book, we see Torrey attempting a non-creedal ordering (though in fact his table of contents is broadly creedal and even shows some signs of being determined by Charles Hodge's influential *Systematic Theology*) that nevertheless takes the divinity-humanity schema as its main organizational cue. It is also interesting, however, that Torrey's biblicism produced a large amount of material that did not fit the traditional schema. He made room for this material, but it can hardly be said that he put it in order.

Charles C. Ryrie's *Basic Theology*[9] is a popular-level presentation of doctrine. Ryrie considers it an exercise in systematic theology, where the task is to correlate "the data of biblical revelation as a whole in order to exhibit systematically the total picture of God's self-revelation."[10] His Christology section is interestingly non-traditional: his chapter titles are (40.) The Preincarnate Christ; (41.) The Incarnation of Christ; (42.) The Person of Christ Incarnate; and (43.) Christ: Prophet, Priest, and King.

These are followed by chapters on Christ's resurrection and "post-ascension ministries," while the death of Christ is handled under soteriology. Ryrie's organizational schema is unusual in being somewhat oriented toward narrative: it is the story of Christ who existed before the incarnation, then became incarnate. But when Ryrie gives attention to "the Person of Christ Incarnate," he reverts completely to the divinity-humanity schema, with a sub-section on "the full deity of Christ incarnate" followed by one on "the perfect humanity of Christ incarnate" and "the union of deity and humanity in Christ incarnate." In fact, having invoked those categories, he goes on to sketch the "early history of this doctrine," mainly by providing names and descriptions of heresies down

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[7] R. A. Torrey, *What the Bible Teaches: A Thorough and Comprehensive Study of What the Bible has to Say Concerning the Great Doctrines of which it Treats* (NY: Fleming Revell, 1898), 67-165.

[8] Ibid., 1. Emphasis original.

[9] Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Victor Books, 1986).

[10] Ibid., 14.

to the fifth century, and a chart (p. 253) of those heresies contrasted with "Orthodoxy, defined by Chalcedon, 451." In his introduction, Ryrie notifies readers that although he was engaged in systematic theology, "when it seems appropriate I shall include some history of doctrine in this book."[11] Ironically though, he rarely does so throughout the book; but his section on Christology is one of the few places where he decides that the history of doctrine (at least in the form of heresies rejected) is necessary for getting the work done.

Also we can observe certain overlap in two of the most widely-used contemporary evangelical textbooks of systematic theology, those being the large volumes by Wayne Grudem and Millard Erickson. While their Christologies have some organizational differences, they are broadly similar in layout: the deity-humanity schema is the starting point and the primary ordering principle for the material. Grudem's *Systematic Theology* takes them in the order of humanity, deity, and then "Deity and Humanity in the One Person of Christ,"[12] a discussion which includes some accounts of heresies and the history of doctrine. Erickson's *Christian Theology* (after a methodological chapter) follows the order of deity, humanity, and then "the Unity of the Person of Christ,"[13] again inserting some discussion of the conciliar decisions and the heresies they condemned.

All four of these theological texts intend to be biblically inductive at a fundamental level. Grudem and Erickson show more methodological sophistication than Torrey and Ryrie, but maintain the same priorities of staying close to the Bible's own explicit categories, and teaching at the non-technical level. Likewise, all four, in various ways, negotiate some of the organizational challenges of teaching Christology by making use of the divinity-humanity schema. And this framework, while considered as an organizational principle for expressing the material content of all that the Bible says about Christ, is not itself as prominent in Scripture's own formulations as it is in subsequent patristic theology. It initially emerges very early in Christian reflection on Scripture, and then is authoritatively elaborated in the doctrinal decisions of the ecumenical councils, reaching its classic formulation in Chalcedon.

It seems that even on the more inductive and biblicist side of evangelical theology, when it comes to Christology the organizational schema offered by the early church is gratefully received as a helpful framework. So to accept the divinity-humanity schema for presenting Christology is already to take the first major step down the road to Chalcedonian two-natures Christology. In what follows, I want to show in more detail a few of the pedagogical advantages of wholeheartedly

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[11]Ibid.

[12]Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 554.

[13]Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 723.

embracing the conciliar tradition as an organizing schema for structuring Christology.

III. TEACHING CHALCEDONIAN CHRISTOLOGY

Between Nicaea in 325 and Nicaea II in 787, there were seven councils that are normally counted as ecumenical councils of the undivided church.[14] After 787 the Eastern and Western churches were no longer unified enough to join in formal conciliar meetings, so the age of truly "ecumenical" councils passed. Roman Catholicism, however, considering union with the Bishop of Rome a sufficient criterion of ecumenism, continued to call its own councils ecumenical all the way up to the twenty-first (Vatican II). Of the seven councils, the first four (up to Chalcedon in 451) enjoy special doctrinal authority for most branches of the church, precisely because of the completeness of the Christology summarized in the Chalcedonian Definition of 451. Each council dealt with multiple doctrinal and disciplinary issues, but for our purposes, the following summary picks out their primary teachings on Christology.

1. First Council: Nicaea I, (325)

This council convened to condemn Arianism, which taught that the pre-existent Logos who took on flesh in the incarnation was a great and exalted creature, but not God. The Logos, according to Arius, had come into being from non-existence, even if this coming-into-being had happened before time itself was created. The Arian Christ was obviously superhuman and supernatural, but just as obviously not divine. Because Arians used scriptural language to support their doctrine, the orthodox party selected the non-biblical term "homoousios," "of one substance," as a way of specifying what they meant by the biblical terms. The goal of pro-Nicene theologians was to recognize and assert the complete deity of Jesus Christ, and to do so unequivocally. The creed they produced in 325 called Christ "the Son of God, begotten from the Father, only begotten, that is, from the substance of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance (homoousios) with the Father..."

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[14] I have discussed the Christological and Trinitarian teachings of these councils in my chapter "Chalcedonian Categories for the Gospel Narrative" in *Jesus in Trinitarian Perspective: An Introductory Christology*, ed. Fred Sanders and Klaus Issler (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 1-41. Two good introductions to the councils at a popular level are Peter Toon, *Yesterday, Today and Forever: Jesus Christ and the Holy Trinity in the Teaching of the Seven Ecumenical Councils* (Swedesboro, NJ: Preservation Press, 1996) and Gerald Bray, *Creeds, Councils and Christ* (Fean, Rosshire, UK: Christian Focus, 1997). For reliable English translations of primary texts, consult *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990), vol 1: Nicaea I to Lateran V.

What drove the Nicene theology was not simply an insight into the true interpretation of Scriptural statements about the nature of the Son of God, but also a grasp of the nature of salvation. Nicene theology recognized that Christian salvation entails personal reconciliation with God and an invitation to participate in fellowship with the living God. With that view of salvation in place, the Nicene theology worked out an implicit soteriological axiom that *only God can save us*. Salvation as personal reconciliation to God cannot be delegated to a sub-God, but must be brought about by the one to whom we are reconciled.

The fact that Nicaea's judgment was driven by soteriology means that when we provide biblical evidence for the theology of this council, we are not restricted to passages of Scripture that teach about the nature of the Son of God. By linking this Christological truth to its soteriological context, Nicaea opens up the resources of the rest of the Bible as well, because the personal character of salvation is a topic more widely diffused throughout all of Scripture. Consequently, instead of merely proving the deity of Christ, a biblical defense of Nicaea also mounts an argument from the character of the gospel that only God can be our Savior.

2. Second Council: Constantinople I (381)

The second council mainly gathered to reaffirm the first council; but it also extended Nicene insights to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and took a step forward in Christology. It refuted a new heresy, Apollinarianism, which conceived of the incarnation as an event in which the Logos operated the physical body of Jesus. On the Apollinarian view, the human nature of Jesus Christ had a body but not a soul. Where other humans have created minds or rational souls, the Apollinarian Jesus had the eternal Logos. Recognizing the full deity of Christ at the expense of his full humanity, Apollinarianism resulted in a "God in a bod" Christology. Although Christians had always believed that Jesus was fully human, the sophistication of the Apollinarian error required them to confess this truth in a new, more precise way. And once again, they rooted that confession in soteriology. Gregory of Nazianzus (chairman of the first part of the council) stated the soteriological presupposition classically: "What is not assumed is not healed." The Son of God saves, on this view, by "taking on" or "assuming" human nature into union with himself. Because everything about human nature needs to be saved, Christ took everything about human nature into union with himself. On this view, if Christ had no human mind or soul or whatever we want to call the non-physical element of created humanity, then the human mind or soul is left unredeemed because it was not assumed.

Again, conciliar Christology presents us with a beneficial soteriological detour. Proving the full humanity of Christ from Scripture is a strange undertaking, usually resulting in lists of human activities that

he performed in the gospels (he ate, he slept, he grew). Often the appeal is made to the fact that everyone who knew him thought of him as human. The proof runs the risk of triviality, and what is always needed is an explanation of the significance of his full humanity. The second council provides that: he had to have perfect humanity in order to save humanity, because he saves by taking that nature into personal union with himself.

Now admittedly, the second council's detour through this soteriological axiom seems at first like the hardest conciliar doctrine to demonstrate from Scripture's own categories. But in fact it takes us into territory much more rewarding than merely proving that the man Jesus Christ was a man because he acted like one. A crucial and under-developed point of contact is the word "taken up" or "assumed," which the church fathers rooted primarily in Hebrews 2:16-17: "For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect." The word here translated "helps" is ἐπιλαμβάνεται, which etymologically is "take up" or "take on," and is elsewhere translated "lay hold of," especially "lay hold of in order to assist," or even "hug." Lutheran theologian Martin Chemnitz offers a long theological gloss on this term from Hebrews 2:16, noting it as one of the "main words used by Scripture and the ancient church" to describe the incarnation: "This word indicates the union of two things, without commingling, such as when something is apprehended so that it is held firmly." It means "to apprehend, to retain firmly, not to let go."

> And the Son of God assumed the seed of Abraham, not in the way Jacob grasped the heel of Esau, but in such a way that He might be in all things like His brothers, except for sin, and that He might be made one hypostasis with the seed which He assumed.[15]

Chemnitz may be telescoping a complete fourth-council Christology into his commentary on the word, (indeed, perhaps even reaching beyond to the fifth council), but that is because his task is to explain how this Scriptural word was used in the early church's theology. The immediate context of Hebrews ("he had to be made like his brothers in every respect") shows that this "taking on" or "assuming" links Christology with soteriology, in fact grounding the Christology in the nature of the salvation accomplished. So if, instead of proving the humanity of Christ in the abstract, we focused on proving the humanity of Christ for soteriological reasons, we would be both biblically richer and more conciliar at once. That is the point.

After Constantinople I, the ultimate terms of divinity and humanity are both explicit in Christological reflection. The divinity-humanity

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[15]Martin Chemnitz, *The Two Natures in Christ* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971, originally published in Latin, Leipzig, 1578), 116.

schema is in place. At subsequent councils, the question shifts to how the deity and humanity of Christ are related to each other in the one person of the Lord. We have gained much from the soteriological detours that conciliar Christology puts in the path of our proving the deity and humanity of Christ. In teaching the next two councils, we will continue to do so, but the soteriological element, admittedly, becomes less prominent as the question changes. Also, the soteriological concerns of Nicaea and Constantinople do not go away to be replaced by others, but continue to make themselves present in the deliberations of Ephesus and Chalcedon. The same salvation is at stake, and the divinity-humanity schema continues to address it.

3. Third Council: Ephesus (431)

Nestorianism is a type of Christological heresy which draws such a sharp distinction between the divinity and humanity of Christ that it treats the two natures as separable, and even begins to conceive them as distinct agents. The conflict over Nestorianism emerged over the question of who Mary gave birth to. Nestorius suggested that we should not say that Mary had carried and given birth to God (earning her the traditional title Theotokos, God-bearer). Instead he preferred the term Christotokos, Christ-bearer, since the divine nature of Christ was not the offspring of Mary. Beneath this reticence, Cyril of Alexandria detected a Christology that was too disjunctive. It considered the human nature and divine nature of Christ as practically two distinct persons. For Nestorianism, the one person Jesus Christ seems to be reduced to nothing but a way of talking about what these two vastly different natures do together.

Cyril cut through this confusion, teaching that the eternal Logos, who existed before all ages and was consubstantial with the Father, is the one who takes on a perfect human nature and is the subject of the incarnation. He, the Logos, is the one who is born of Mary and dies on the cross. He never ceases to be homoousios with the Father (he is God, having the divine nature) and he becomes fully homoousios with his mother (he is human, having a human nature). As a result of this union in his person, anything we say of one of his natures, we say about him, the one Jesus Christ. Notice that the old Nicene soteriological axiom is still at work here. Only God can save us, and therefore the one born of Mary and crucified under Pilate must be that one. So Nicene soteriology is radicalized and specified further. For the sake of salvation, the subject who undertakes all the acts of the incarnation must be the person of the Son. Natures do not act; this person does.

4. Fourth Council: Chalcedon (451)

If the council of Ephesus championed unity of person over against excessive duality, the next council had to guard against distinction of

natures over against excessive views of Christ's unity. The heresy of Eutychianism proposed that the two natures of Christ blended into one new nature in the inearnation. Eutychians apparently believed themselves to be loyal adherents of Cyril's theology from the previous council, but in fact they pushed Cyrilline theology to a drastic extreme. Chalcedon therefore anathematized "those who imagine a mixture or confusion of the two natures of Christ" and also "those who, first idly talk of the natures of the Lord as 'two before the union' and then conceive but one 'after the union.'" The two natures must not be described as blending or forming one new nature.

There is a subtle soteriological motive at work here. The fathers of Chalcedon knew that if Christ's two natures mingled, they would not in fact produce a 50-50 mixture in a new nature. Divinity is of course infinitely larger than humanity, so the result of the Eutychian mixing of natures would be a Christ whose human nature was swallowed up in his divine nature like a drop in the ocean. This mixed-nature hypostasis after the incarnation would be in some ways like the Christ of Apollinarianism: not fully human. To encounter it would be so directly an encounter with God that the human element would be eclipsed.

John 1:14 declares that "the word became flesh." In some ways, the progress of the conciliar Christology is the unfolding of each term in that sentence, in earnest: The real word (Nicaea, Ephesus) really became real flesh (Constantinople, Chalcedon). And the constant motive for delving ever deeper into that Scriptural statement is soteriological. So the whole process happened under the banner of the phrase from the Nicene creed: "For us and our salvation."

Thus, in the end Chalcedon delivers the full scope of the divinity-humanity schema for teaching Christology and also maps out two opposite errors regarding how they can be related to each other in the hypostatic union. All the fundamental questions have been asked and the major mistakes have been refuted, which is why the Chalcedonian Definition attained its status as a classic theological statement. Its central section sums up centuries of doctrinal controversy and argument about the interpretation of the Bible:

> He was begotten before the ages from the Father as regards his divinity, and in the last days the same for us and for our salvation from Mary, the virgin God-bearer, as regards his humanity; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, acknowledged in two natures which undergo no confusion, no change, no division, no separation; at no point was the difference between the natures taken away through the union, but rather the property of both natures is preserved and comes together into a single person and a single subsistent being...

IV. CONCLUSION: A STEP BEYOND CHALCEDON

But precisely when we take up Chalcedonian categories as an organizing schema for teaching Christology, we recognize that it has not quite said everything. If we consider the four rulings of the four councils as boundary markers, they rule out errors regarding Christ's divinity (Nicaea), his humanity (Constantinople), his unity of person (Ephesus) and his distinction of natures (Chalcedon). But does not Christology need to do more than rule out errors? Must not there be something at the center of the field mapped out by those boundaries?

At the fifth ecumenical council (Constantinople II, 553), on the basis of Chalcedon, the church fathers provided a doctrinal (and again, soteriological) answer to that question. They began to make explicit once again the personal identity of this one God-man about whom they had achieved doctrinal clarity. At the center of the open space marked out by the boundaries of Chalcedon they had always presupposed the biblical narrative of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And they had also presupposed that this person in the gospel stories is an eternal person distinct from the Father yet fully divine. In other words, the field marked out by Chalcedon has at its center the biblical story of Jesus, interpreted in light of the Trinity.

When Constantinople II met under Emperor Justinian, it reaffirmed all the teachings of the previous councils. But it also went on to smooth out some conflict that had begun to emerge between the unity championed by Ephesus (one person) and the duality championed by Chalcedon (two natures). It gave a certain priority to the one person in the incarnation by making explicit the fact that this one person was the second person of the Trinity, and that as that one eternal person he eternally had the divine nature and then added to himself the human nature. Granting priority to the one trinitarian person who is the agent of incarnation enabled them to re-introduce the long narrative arc of the incarnation, beginning in heaven and tracing the descent from the Son's eternal begetting to his birth from the virgin Mary. In this way the fifth council eliminated the possibility of thinking (in Nestorian fashion) about a separable human person in the incarnation, a human nature of Jesus who was somebody distinct from the Logos. No such person ever existed or ever could, because the human nature of Jesus Christ was nobody until it was personalized by the eternal Logos. The Son took that human nature on as his own, making it somebody: himself, the Son incarnate.

Succinctly, Jesus Christ is human, and Jesus Christ is a person. It is also true that Jesus Christ is a human person, unless by "a human person" you mean "a created human nature is personalized by a created human personhood." Instead, Jesus Christ is a human person because he is an eternal person who took on human nature. There was no Mr. Jesus who went missing once the Son of God arrived. Mary did not lose her baby to a divine person; that one was always the Son.

With the conceptually powerful two-natures thinking of Chalcedon at our disposal, it would be easy to imagine that the key to Christology would be to double everything according to the logic of two perfect natures unconfused, unchanged, undivided, and unseparated. But at the center of the incarnation is something undoubled: the one person of the Son. The person involved in the incarnation is not something made by adding quantities from above and below. He comes down from above and takes to himself what is below. The legitimate parallelism of Christology is limited by Trinitarian thought. To rehearse the councils again, this one divine person (Ephesus) who is fully divine and fully human (Chalcedon) is the second person of the Trinity (Constantinople II).

Here, I think, is the great payoff of adopting conciliar Christology as the organizing schema for teaching about Jesus Christ. We have already seen how the decisions of the church fathers send us on a detour into soteriology, an enriching detour from which we return with more biblical evidence. Instead of seeking biblical evidence to prove the results of the councils (full God, fully human, etc.) from Scripture, we gain a great deal from proving instead the soteriological axioms from Scripture: Only God can save us; what is not assumed is not healed; the one person has two natures. And in the systematically summarizing insight of the fifth council we come full circle, returning to the biblical narrative of this one who came down and was made human for us and our salvation. Evangelical and patristic insights are joined and fused here. The long narrative arc from the Son's eternal pre-existence in the Trinity, through his virgin birth, death, resurrection, and ascension, is the story of salvation confessed and taught in an orderly fashion via the conciliar Christology with its biblical grounding made explicit.

The divinity-humanity schema, the soteriological detour, and the long narrative arc of the incarnation of one person of the Trinity are great pedagogical helps in teaching Christology in such a way that the full counsel of the word of God is communicated. So it would appear that those of us who want to be maximally biblical in our teaching about Jesus Christ have good reason to make use of these traditional categories as the organizational principle for presenting the biblical content of Christology.