

# Interpreting Conciliar Christology: An Overview in the Service of Analytic Theology

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**ABSTRACT:** Given the interest in analytic theology circles about following “conciliar Christology,” this article describes three different patterns by which patristics scholars in the past 150 years have interpreted the relations between the Ecumenical Councils, patterns that I label as “pendulum swing,” “synthesis of emphases,” and “Cyrillian/traditional.” The article argues that whereas much theological work on Christology may be based on the synthesis-of-emphases pattern, the ascendant paradigm among patristics scholars is Cyrillian/traditional. It makes a case that the councils understood themselves as moving in a straight line of development from one to another and as proclaiming a broadly Cyrillian Christology, in which the person of the Logos is the subject of all actions and experiences of the incarnate Christ. Given the significance of this issue for discussions of Christ’s human freedom and other questions, analytic theologians would do well to be aware of these currents in patristics scholarship on the Ecumenical Councils.

Conciliar Christology, defined as that which was promoted by the (first) seven Ecumenical Councils from AD 325 to 787, has long been the touchstone of Christological orthodoxy, and most theologians who value the church’s great tradition have sought to align their pictures of Christ with the teaching of the Ecumenical Councils.<sup>1</sup> But this raises the obvious question of what exactly constitutes conciliar Christology. In the introduction to the most prominent recent book on the subject in analytic theology circles, Timothy Pawl declares: “I will be assuming the truth of all the Christological claims found in the documents of the above-listed ecumenical councils. This includes their creeds, canons, expositions of faith, and anathemas, as well as any documents accepted and endorsed in the previously listed sources” (2016, 3).

Pawl’s laudable intention to uphold all the Christological claims of the councils sits atop a mountain of historical and theological complexities. The Ecumenical Councils involved the intertwining of myriad theological and political factors over the course of nearly five centuries, during which time the ancient Roman world itself dissolved into the disparate realities of the so-called “Byzantine” and “Holy Roman” Empires. Moreover, the surviving documents related to the third through sixth Ecumenical Councils (the ones most pertinent to Christology, although the seventh was in some ways broadly Christological as well) comprise more than a thousand pages per council, the majority of which have never been translated into English. Indeed, two decades ago even the acts of the councils themselves (comprising a few hundred pages of documents for each council) were largely unavailable in English, and most Anglophone theologians were working with only the most central documents—say, less than fifty pages per council and maybe as little as a handful of pages. Few theologians have read,

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<sup>1</sup> This article has benefited from discussion before, during, and after the Carolina Analytic Theology Workshop, held May 19–20, 2022 at Anderson University (SC). Among the attendees, I would particularly like to thank my former students Anthony Catri and J. T. Turner for prodding me to enter this conversation and for interacting with the ideas I present here, and Ross Inman, R. T. Mullins, and Timothy Pawl for welcoming me into a new field as a colleague.

let alone absorbed or studied, more than a relatively small fraction of the available material. And even if one has read all the material, accepting all the Christological claims of the councils is not by any means a straightforward matter. The acts of the councils show that not all documents were accepted *in toto* or on an equal footing: some were merely received,<sup>2</sup> others were approved, still others were approved only once they were understood in light of other approved documents.<sup>3</sup>

Unlike historical theologians, systematic and analytic theologians cannot be expected to wade through the entire collection of material or even the growing portion of it available in English. Nor can they be expected to weigh the various factors, complexities, and loyalties that affected the actions of the bishops assembled at the councils or to weigh the decrees of each council in comparison with other councils. They must work with summaries and overviews, at least to a great degree. In acknowledgment that analytic theologians need plausible summaries, then, this article will suggest that the ways patristics scholars have interpreted the Christology of the Ecumenical Councils can fairly be summarized into three broad patterns.

Of these three, the first—which I will call the “pendulum swing” pattern—sees patristic Christology in terms of competing emphases associated with the so-called schools of Alexandria and Antioch. On this view, the proclamations of the councils veered from one emphasis to the other: the unity of Christ at Ephesus I (431), the duality of Christ at Chalcedon (451), the unity again at Constantinople II (553), and the duality again at Constantinople III (681). On this understanding, there was no conciliar consensus about Christ. The second—which I will label the “synthesis of emphases” pattern—does see a genuine consensus through the fourth, fifth, and sixth councils, but sees this consensus as a synthesis (or even a compromise) between the emphases mentioned above. On this understanding, the consensus that we can call “conciliar Christology” was a somewhat shallow one revolving around the language of two natures [*physeis* in Greek, *naturae* in Latin] and one person [*hypostasis* or *prosopon* in Greek, *persona* or *subsistentia* in Latin], with considerable variation within the consensus on how those concepts are worked out. The third—usually called the “Cyrillian” or “Alexandrian” or “Neochalcedonian” pattern—sees all the councils in light of the insistence that the Christological union took place in the person of the Logos, an insistence associated especially with Cyril of Alexandria.

In this article, I will give a summary of each interpretive pattern, with particular attention to noteworthy major patristics scholars who have held to that pattern. Since the first two patterns both depend on the notion of a clash between two schools, Antioch and Alexandria, I will preface my summaries of those two patterns with a brief discussion of the two-schools idea. Then, after discussing all three patterns, I will argue that only a Cyrillian interpretation of the Ecumenical Councils can genuinely make sense of them as a unified whole with a

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<sup>2</sup> For example, take the case of the letter to Mari the Persian. Ibas of Edessa, its (alleged) author, had been condemned by Ephesus II in 449 (the “Robber Synod”) but was reinstated at Chalcedon. The proceedings dealing with Ibas (*Acts of Chalcedon* 10–11 [ACO 2.1.3.10–42; Price and Gaddis 2007, II.259–64, 273–309]) indicate a great deal of confusion about Ibas and his teaching, but it is clear that the letter to Mari the Persian was read out and that Ibas was seated. The *Acts of Constantinople II* 6.1–10 (ACO 4.1.137–47; Price 2009, II.5–20) claim that at Chalcedon, Ibas himself had anathematized the letter attributed to him. Thus, that letter was interpreted at Constantinople II as having been merely received at Chalcedon, not approved. (Throughout this article, in all references to primary sources, the location of the Greek or Latin critical text is listed first, followed by the location of an English translation.)

<sup>3</sup> See my discussion later in this article of the way Leo’s *Tome* (*Ep.* 28) was accepted at Chalcedon.

consistent Christology all the way through. Therefore, analytic theologians would do well to take Cyrillian Christology very seriously as they develop their own models of the incarnation.

## 1. Foundation of the First Two Patterns: The Schools of Antioch and Alexandria

The first two patterns I will describe are both based on the notion that patristic Christology involved a clash between two “schools,” one based in Antioch and the other in Alexandria. The idea of two schools is a modern creation; it seems to have begun with John Henry Newman’s *Arians of the Fourth Century* (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1833) and was put forward most forcefully by Adolph von Harnack in *History of Dogma* (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1885), whose vast influence meant that the two-schools idea would dominate reconstructions of patristic Christology for the better part of a century.

Fundamental to the two-schools approach is the belief that Antioch and Alexandria were both well represented and roughly equally influential in the early church. The alleged Antiochenes included Eustathius of Antioch and Diodore of Tarsus in the fourth century, and Theodore of Mopsuestia, Severian of Gabbala, Nestorius, and Theodoret of Cyrus in the fifth. Alexandrians included Origen in the third century, Athanasius and Didymus in the fourth, and Theophilus, Cyril, and Dioscorus in the fifth, all from the city of Alexandria.<sup>4</sup> Earlier iterations of the approach, including Harnack’s, argued that the differences in Christology grew out of differences in exegetical method, with Antioch representing historically sensitive, sober, literal exegesis akin to that which later would purportedly characterize the nineteenth century (when the idea of such a school was first proposed), and Alexandria representing philosophically concerned allegorical exegesis similar to that of the Middle Ages later. While later proponents of the two-schools approach recognized that exegetical method alone could hardly be considered the source of the differences between Antioch and Alexandria, many patristics scholars throughout the twentieth century continued to ascribe the same distinctive Christological premises to the two schools that Harnack had proposed. Antioch, it was and is argued, had a profound concern for the full humanity of Christ, whereas Alexandria gave only lip service to that truth.<sup>5</sup>

Even while the Antioch/Alexandria dichotomy reigned as the interpretive lens through which to view patristic Christology, scholars differed on whether they considered the Christology of the two schools to be compatible, and if not, on which of the schools they found to be more biblically compelling. Scholars who found Antioch to be superior have generally argued for a pendulum-swing pattern to the Ecumenical Councils. Scholars who found the schools to be compatible and believed we needed to balance emphases of both have normally interpreted the councils in a way that fits what I call the synthesis-of-emphases pattern. Finally, scholars who found Alexandria to be closer to the truth have argued for other ways of distinguishing the so-called Alexandrians from the so-called Antiochenes and have not accepted the notion that the Antiochenes were widely represented in the church. These

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<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting that all the “Alexandrians” were associated with the city of Alexandria, whereas the “Antiochenes” often had little or no connection with Antioch itself.

<sup>5</sup> For an excellent summary of the distinctives of Alexandria and Antioch, as well as a gentle critique of certain versions of the two-schools approach, see Daley 2015.

scholars have preferred to see the councils as “Cyrillian,” and this third pattern has usually been labeled Alexandrian or Neochalcedonian by its detractors, not its proponents. With this background in mind, I turn to each of the patterns itself.

## 2. Conciliar Christology as a Series of Pendulum Swings

By far the dominant voice arguing for the inconsistency of the Ecumenical Councils, and thus for the progress of those councils as a pendulum swing between competing images, has been that of Adolph von Harnack. Indeed, Harnack insisted that conciliar inconsistency began even before the Christological councils (nos. 3–6). He drew a sharp line between the Creed of Nicaea (325) and the Creed of Constantinople (what we today call the Nicene Creed), insisting that the latter did not derive from Constantinople I in 381 (this remains a debated question today) and labeling the theology of the Cappadocians as inconsistent with the earlier theology of Athanasius (1897, 99–100).

Turning to the fifth century, Harnack insisted that the Antiochene (especially Theodorean/Nestorian) view of Christ meant that the union was merely nominal and that Christ was effectively two persons, in the sense of two subjects who acted separately (1897, 168).<sup>6</sup> There is general agreement among patristics scholars that Harnack was right about Theodore and Nestorius, but he went on to insist that this Antiochene view was also the western view and proclaimed it a scandal that Pope Celestine sided with Cyril rather than Nestorius from 428–31 (1897, 182–4). In sharp contrast, Harnack equated the eastern/Alexandrian faith with the formula “one nature [*physis* in Greek],” and insisted that after Cyril’s death in 444 the dogmatic agreement between the west and Antioch, suppressed by Celestine in order to get rid of Nestorius, had to find expression. Leo’s *Tome*, Harnack argued, virtually enhypostatized the two natures [*naturae* in Latin] by arguing that each nature has its own mode of action, thus approaching Nestorianism in postulating two acting subjects in Christ while treating the one “person [*persona*]” as merely a combination of the Logos and the man (1897, 205–6). Harnack took Chalcedon’s acceptance of the *Tome* as an endorsement of this idea, and thus insisted that Chalcedon was an imposition of a western/Antiochene formula (two natures, virtually in the sense of two persons, since the natures constituted two separate acting subjects) upon an eastern church that could not accept it (1897, 215–19).

At this point, it is worthwhile to note some implications of Harnack’s narrative. First, the key for him was the advocacy of a “one *physis/natura*” or “two *physeis/naturae*” formula, and on the basis of this, he divided the church into an Alexandrian/eastern group and an Antiochene/western alliance. Second, he saw a fundamental similarity between Nestorius’s thought (in which the two natures were two subjects of actions and experiences) and that of Leo’s *Tome*, largely because he regarded the famous passage in the *Tome* in which Leo writes of each form doing what is proper to itself<sup>7</sup>—a passage that was vigorously contested at Chalcedon—as being the heart of the *Tome*. Third, he regarded Chalcedon as fundamentally Antiochene/western/Leonine, and even argued that the formula the council produced was opposed by most of the bishops present. Few later scholars would draw the lines so sharply

<sup>6</sup> For a brief summary of various ways of construing “person” as connoting an acting subject in fourth-century Christology, see Fairbairn 2003 (21–7; for more detail on the way Theodore, Nestorius, and Cyril construed the acting subject(s) of Christ in the fifth century, see 50–1, 57–9, 113–16).

<sup>7</sup> Leo, *Ep.* 28.3 (*ACO* 2.2.1.28; Tanner 1990, 79).

or regard Chalcedon as so thoroughly an Antiochene document. Nevertheless, Harnack's characterization had remarkable staying power. Many scholars have continued to assert that Leo carried the day at Chalcedon in favor of Antioch. As we shall see, however, this was not the way the conciliar church itself understood Chalcedon, and not even the way it understood Leo's *Tome*.

Harnack's pendulum-swing understanding of the councils comes into sharp relief with his interpretation of Constantinople II (553), which insisted on the priority of Cyril's Christology and thus on the claim that the one person of Christ, the sole acting subject, is the Logos himself. Of this insistence Harnack declared:

In a certain sense the blow which the West gave to the East at the Fourth Council was parried by the Fifth Council—in the fashion in which this is done in general in matters of dogma. Rome had given the formula of the two natures to the East, but a hundred years later the East dictated to the West how this formula was to be understood, an interpretation of it which in no way corresponded to the actual wording of the formula. (1897, 250)

Again, we must notice the implications. Harnack gave no credence to the possibility that Chalcedon itself might have meant what Constantinople II claimed it meant. Chalcedon must, in his eyes, be seen as an Antiochene/Leonine/Nestorian statement of two natures in the sense of two subjects of action. Constantinople II's assertion to the contrary must therefore, in Harnack's eyes, be seen as a contradiction of Chalcedon, in spite of what the council of 553 said about itself. Here again, few later scholars would put this as bluntly as Harnack did. But the notion of a basic consistency between Antioch, Nestorius, Leo, and Chalcedon and a tendency to set that alleged consistency over against Alexandria remains today and continues to be influential.

At Constantinople III in 681, the church affirmed two natural wills in Christ, divine and human, and insisted that Christ's human will perfectly submitted to his divine will.<sup>8</sup> Harnack's assessment is again striking: "It is incontrovertible that Rome at the Fourth and Sixth Councils permanently gave *her* formula to the East and that this formula admits of a Graeco-Cyrrillian interpretation only by the use of theological artifice" (1897, 263). Harnack went on to claim that the doctrine of two wills was inconsistent with the faith of the Alexandrian/eastern church and that the bishops in this group accepted Constantinople III only because they had secured their faith at Constantinople II. The possibility that Constantinople II and Constantinople III might be jointly consistent, that the latter might be drawing out an implication of the former, was not something he discussed.

In the early and mid-twentieth century, other scholars followed Harnack in seeing a stark contrast between Alexandria and Antioch, and in seeing Chalcedon (451) and Constantinople III (681) as fundamentally Antiochene and inconsistent with Ephesus I (431) and Constantinople II (553). Charles Raven (1923) famously argued that Cyril's Christology was essentially Apollinarian and found in Theodore a more biblical emphasis on the genuine humanity of Christ (279-80, 297-8). Rowan Greer (1961) argued that Theodore's dualistic Christology treating the Logos and the assumed man as distinct subjects derived from his

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<sup>8</sup> *Acts of Constantinople III* 18 (*ACO*<sup>2</sup> 2.2.775–6; Tanner 1990, 128–9).

exegetical interest in the historical Jesus, in contrast to the Alexandrian concern for static ontology (110–11).<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, after about the middle of the twentieth century, relatively few patristics scholars have seen the contrast between Antiochene/western and Alexandrian/eastern as starkly as Harnack did. Most subsequent scholars would treat the concerns of the two groups more as complementary emphases, not as rigid contradictions. Even so, two aspects of his work have loomed large over subsequent scholarship. The first is his conviction that the language of “one nature” and “two natures” accurately reflects the differences between the competing groups (or, if one wishes to soften the contrast, the varying emphases). This would be true only if everyone were using “*physis*” and “*natura*” the same way, which was certainly not the case. Although theologians and philosophers vigorously investigate how patristic authors used “*physis*” and “*natura*”, and perhaps debate even more what “*nature*” ought to mean, less often do they consider the possibility that “one *physis*” and “two *physeis*” could have been consistent,<sup>10</sup> even though Constantinople II asserted that they could be.<sup>11</sup> The second aspect is Harnack’s notion that the west was allied with Antioch and his depiction of Chalcedon as an Antiochene/Leonine document. That the delegates at Chalcedon said of the *Tome*, “Peter has uttered this through Leo”<sup>12</sup> is universally known. That there were serious objections to the *Tome* that required a nuanced interpretation of the document before the delegates could make that acclamation is much less well known.<sup>13</sup> Harnack’s assessment of the Christological controversies is still very much with us.

At the same time, if anything about the councils is clear, it is that they saw themselves as building one upon the others, with each new council clarifying and adding to, rather than departing from, the decrees of the previous councils.<sup>14</sup> Chalcedon actually quotes in full both the Creed of Nicaea and the later version of the Nicene Creed and offers its reflections as a commentary on those documents.<sup>15</sup> Constantinople II explicitly aligns the Creed of Nicaea, the later Nicene Creed, the pronouncements of Ephesus I (431), and the Chalcedonian

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<sup>9</sup> It is also worth noting that modern Oriental Orthodox scholars, like their confessional forebears in the sixth century, have continued to see Chalcedon as Antiochene/Nestorian, and thus inconsistent with Ephesus I. Notable among them are Samuel (1964–5) and Gregorios (1987).

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Zachhuber 2020, who deals extensively with the terminology of “*ousia*”, “*physis*”, and “*hypostasis*” and who treats the sixth century in great detail, but who even so does not address the sanctioning of both “*mia physis*” and “*duo physeis*” at Constantinople II. Instead, his argument focuses on the opposition between miaphysites and dyophysites, and particularly on the different ways the two groups modified what he calls the classical philosophical theory inherited from the Cappadocians. Likewise van Loon (2009) uses his extensive study of Cyril of Alexandria’s terminology to argue that the famous Alexandrian was actually at heart a dyophysite, even though he was virtually the patron saint of later miaphysitism. Van Loon asserts correctly that Cyril used the “*mia physis*” formula rarely and only because he thought it came from Athanasius, but van Loon does not acknowledge the possibility that with different uses of “*physis*”, “*mia physis*” and “*duo physeis*” could be consistent. This is striking, given that his subject is the church father most famous for using both of those expressions and thus for using “*physis*” in markedly different ways himself.

<sup>11</sup> *Acts of Constantinople II* 8.5.7–8 (*ACO* 4.1.217; Price 2009, II.122–3 [cf. Tanner 1990, 117–18]).

<sup>12</sup> *Acts of Chalcedon* 3.23 (*ACO* 2.1.2.81; Price and Gaddis 2007, II.24). Although this was chronologically the second session of the council, the Greek *Acts* reversed the order of sessions two and three for thematic reasons, and thus this session is numbered as three and sometimes referred to as the third session.

<sup>13</sup> See my discussion later in this article.

<sup>14</sup> The task of clarifying ambiguities in earlier councils is especially important and means that we should not regard the decrees of an earlier council as being the final word on its subject. Interpreting Chalcedon, for example, without paying attention to Constantinople II and III is a recipe for misreading the spirit of conciliar Christology.

<sup>15</sup> *Acts of Chalcedon* 5.30–4 (*ACO* 2.1.2.126–30; Price and Gaddis 2007, II.201–5 [cf. Tanner 1990, 83–7]).

Definition.<sup>16</sup> Constantinople III repeats verbatim the two creeds, cites almost verbatim significant excerpts from the Chalcedonian Definition, aligns itself with all five previous councils, and depicts its own pronouncements as logical inferences from Chalcedon in particular.<sup>17</sup> For scholars and theologians who seek to be faithful to the spirit of the Ecumenical Councils, viewing them as jointly inconsistent is simply not a live option. Yet the notion of widely represented Antiochene and Alexandrian schools and the belief that their emphases were dramatically different assumed an almost axiomatic status through the work of Harnack and has continued to be repeated by patristics scholars and theologians ever since. As a result, scholars who were concerned to seek the consistency of all the councils have generally worked within an Antiochene/Alexandrian framework but have regarded the differences between them as complementary emphases that could be synthesized into a coherent whole. The effort to do this led to a second broad pattern for interpreting the Ecumenical Councils.

### 3. Conciliar Christology as a Synthesis of Varied Emphases

The shift away from seeing Antioch and Alexandria as incompatible began in the mid-twentieth century and was exemplified by the work of R. V. Sellers, who showed great appreciation for both schools and regarded Ephesus I (431) as the place where the two schools met, for the good of the whole church. He insisted that both schools were arguing for the same principles (unity of person and duality of natures), that both made major contributions to the church's understanding of Christ, and that if they had come to Ephesus to learn, rather than to argue, they might have come to an agreement about terminology then and there (1940, 233). Similarly, he asserted that the climactic paragraph of the Chalcedonian Definition was built on the same two principles and was deliberately drawn from different sources—Antiochene, Alexandrian, and Western—in order to bring together the distinctive contributions of different groups (1953, 211–12). While Sellers did not actually use the phrase “synthesis of emphases” as an interpretive category, he clearly advocated this understanding of Chalcedon.

The most significant representative of this pattern was Aloys Grillmeier, whose monumental multi-volume opus *Christ in Christian Tradition* has been the most influential work on patristic Christology in the late twentieth century and into the twenty-first. Grillmeier's analysis hinged around his distinction between what he called *Logos-sarx* Christology associated with Alexandria and *Logos-anthropos* Christology associated with Antioch. In his interpretation, the *Logos-sarx* Christology started out in the fourth century affirming the Logos's assumption of human flesh alone, then later shifted to the affirmation of a human mind in Christ in response to Apollinarianism. However, Grillmeier asserted that *Logos-sarx* Christology struggled to make the human mind a “theological factor,” a genuine element in its picture of redemption. He concluded that even the orthodox version of this Christology (between the extremes of Arianism and Apollinarianism) was plagued by a misunderstanding of Christ's humanity and his human psychology (1975, 341–3). Grillmeier saw the *Logos-anthropos* Christology developing as a different reaction to Apollinarianism than that of the orthodox *Logos-sarx* Christology, one in which Theodore in particular saw redemption accomplished

<sup>16</sup> *Acts of Constantinople II* 8.4.24–7 (*ACO* 4.1.213–14; Price 2009, II.117–19 [cf. Tanner 1990, 112–13]).

<sup>17</sup> *Acts of Constantinople III* 18 (*ACO*<sup>2</sup> 2.2.768–76; Tanner 1990, 125–30).

through a man with whom God has clothed himself and over whom the Logos reigns through grace. The assumed man's character is shaped by the Logos who indwells him, which illumines an aspect of Christ's inner life that was absent or neglected in *Logos-sarx* Christology (1975, 427–37). Like Harnack, Grillmeier saw western Christology as basically in line with that of Antioch (1975, 404, 408–9).

Grillmeier's treatment of Ephesus I focused on the Formula of Reunion, and he emphasized the Antiochene provenance of that Formula. At the same time, he stressed the fact that Ephesus I saw the human life of Christ predicated of the Logos who is *homoousios* with the Father, in very Cyrillian/Alexandrian fashion (1975, 484–6). Likewise, Grillmeier saw Chalcedon as a synthesis of Antiochene and Alexandrian emphases, and he paid particular attention to the provenance of each phrase in the Chalcedonian Definition. Thus, he regarded the “two *physeis*” formula as being Antiochene (from the Formula of Reunion) and Leonine (from the *Tome*), and he stressed that at the same time, Chalcedon described the incarnation as an event that happened to the Logos in strongly Alexandrian/Cyrillian fashion (1975, 546–53). In this approach, we see a concern for formulae and their origins akin to Harnack's, but much more willingness to view the Antiochene and Alexandrian emphases as complementary.

Reading Constantinople II (553) as a synthesis of emphases (rather than an Alexandrian/Cyrillian statement) poses more challenges than reading Chalcedon in that fashion; Grillmeier did so nonetheless. While he admitted that Constantinople II sought to rid Chalcedon of any suspicions that it was Nestorian, he nevertheless argued that the council insisted on the “two-*physeis*” formula rather than demanding either the “one-*physis*” formula of Cyril's followers or the simultaneous use of both “one *physis*” and “two *physeis*” expressions (1995, 456–7). Perhaps more tellingly, he concluded that the council did not do the one thing it needed to: present a definition of “hypostasis” in contrast to “physis”. Although it incorporated Cyrillian language, Constantinople II did not actually achieve a synthesis of Cyril and Chalcedon (1995, 462). Through this interpretation, Grillmeier continued to locate the heart of Christological reflection in the person/nature distinction and significantly muted the Cyrillian tone of Constantinople II.<sup>18</sup>

Another noteworthy example of the synthesis-of-emphases pattern, from about the same time, was Jaroslav Pelikan, who recast *Logos-sarx* and *Logos-anthropos* into the more accurate descriptors “doctrine of the hypostatic union” and “doctrine of the indwelling Logos” (1971, 247). Pelikan differed from Grillmeier in seeing the west more in line with the doctrine of the hypostatic union (that is, with Alexandria), but like Grillmeier he saw Chalcedon as “a compromise formula uniting the partisans of opposing theories and as a basis for continuing development” (1971, 256). Thus, he also saw the Cyrillian interpretation of Chalcedon as a movement away from what that council had actually meant, but unlike Grillmeier, he associated Constantinople II firmly with Cyrillian Chalcedonianism and was critical of the “entire tone of the construction put on Chalcedon” (1971, 277). Not surprisingly, Pelikan was more favorable toward Constantinople III, arguing, “This clarification and expansion of Chalcedon in the direction of teaching two wills and two actions was made necessary on the grounds both of theology and of economy” (1974, 72). Pelikan should perhaps be regarded as taking a mean between Harnack and Grillmeier—he was, like the former, willing to see pendulum movement from council to council, but he agreed with the latter that the truth lay in a synthesis of the varied emphases.

<sup>18</sup> Grillmeier's monumental project ended with the end of the sixth century and thus did not include Constantinople III, but it is certain that he would have seen that council as the outworking of the “two *physeis*” Christology of Chalcedon.



An important implication of the synthesis-of-emphases pattern is that the more one focuses on formulae, and the more one seeks to balance formulae taken from various sources, the more prone one is to see Christological doctrine as the production of correct language rather than an actual description of the person of the incarnate Christ. R. A. Norris gave classic expression to this tendency in the introduction to his widely used anthology of sources from the Christological controversy. Of the Chalcedonian Definition, he wrote:

This formula, the final product of the classical christological controversies, is essentially a rule of christological language. Its terms are not calculated to picture the way in which Jesus is put together. Rather, they are calculated to explain how it is proper to speak of him. Orthodoxy consists in the acknowledgment that Jesus is one subject, who is properly spoken of both as God—the divine Logos—and as a human being.... There is a sense, therefore, in which it is true that Chalcedon solves the christological problem by laying out its terms. Its formula dictates not a Christology but formal outlines of an adequate christological language. (1980, 30–1)

This important statement shows the same concern for language, for terminology, that dominated both the pendulum-swing and the synthesis-of-emphasis patterns. The main significance of this statement is that it reflects the common belief that Chalcedon does not require any particular metaphysical model. Whether or not it is correct to speak of Antiochene or Alexandrian approaches as “metaphysical models,” if one is compelled to choose between them, one is more likely to be wedded to a particular model that one believes grows out of the approach one chooses. But if one sees orthodox Christology as a synthesis of various emphases—and especially if one sees the synthesis largely in the employment of particular language—then one may believe the theologian has considerable freedom in defining the prescribed terms and creating models of the incarnation while remaining within the bounds of orthodox (or even conciliar) Christology. The synthesis-of-emphasis pattern is thus understandably appealing to analytic theologians.

Nevertheless, as patristics scholarship continued in the twentieth century and beyond, many patristics scholars became disenchanted with the Antiochene/Alexandrian framework as expressed in either of the two patterns discussed so far, and a third pattern of interpretation began to become more prominent. I now turn to that approach.

#### **4. Conciliar Christology as Fundamentally Cyrillian**

Shortly after Grillmeier produced the first volume of his Christological opus, John Meyendorff published *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*. Like Harnack’s earlier work and unlike that of Grillmeier, Meyendorff’s important survey saw Antioch and Alexandria as incompatible; but in contrast to Harnack, it saw Alexandrian/Cyrrillian Christology as representative of the church as a whole. Meyendorff claimed that Antiochene theology, with its stress on the human nature of Christ as the source of our redemption, was similar to modern humanism that locates man’s salvation in his own effort toward goodness in imitation of Jesus. But, Meyendorff argued, what prevented the Antiochenes from moving completely into this realm was the Church’s tradition, which continually forced them to see the divine Christ as the instigator of salvation and victor over death, but they had no theological basis of their own for explaining

this view. In opposition, Cyril saw redemption as being wholly a work of God, and thus the unity of Christ in the *hypostasis* of the Word (as the only subject) was essential (1975, 17–18).

Meyendorff went on to argue that Chalcedon did not abandon Cyril's authority or champion a return to Antiochene theology; instead, it sought to express Cyril's picture of Christ in clearer terminology (1975, 24). He argued that Constantinople II (following Justinian's *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*) insisted on interpreting Chalcedon in light of Cyril and pointed out that the council clarified Cyril's infamous "one incarnate *physis*" formula by understanding it in the sense of "one incarnate *hypostasis*." Significantly, Meyendorff argued that "consciousness" is related to nature and that Christ had complete human consciousness even though his humanity dwelt in the *hypostasis* of the Word (1975, 83–7). He regarded Maximus the Confessor as key to the understanding of Constantinople III and argued that Maximus saw Christ as possessing a natural human will, but because the subject of his being was the Logos himself, he could not have a gnomic will (that is, a will subject to deliberation about whether to follow a sinful course of action or not) (1975, 149–51).

Meyendorff's work is important because it demonstrates a way of understanding the progression of the Ecumenical Councils that sees them as jointly consistent (which, we must always remember, is the way they viewed themselves) and finds that consistency not in the balancing of Antiochene and Alexandrian emphases, but in the focus on the Logos as the subject of Christ, and thus the one to whom his human experiences happen. One could call this an "Alexandrian" reading of the councils, but if Meyendorff is right, it would be more accurate to say that this is a "traditional" reading of those councils, a reading in which Antiochene thought was atypical and so-called Alexandrian thought represented the consensus of the church as a whole. More recent major patristics scholars with understandings very similar to Meyendorff's include John McGuckin (1994), John Behr (2011), and Thomas Weinandy (2015).<sup>19</sup>

One of the most important scholars to argue for this Cyrillian/traditional understanding of the Ecumenical Councils in the twenty-first century has been Richard Price, the premier translator of the acts of those councils into English. In his assessment of Chalcedon's theology, Price writes, "The fathers of Chalcedon were profuse in their professions of loyalty to Cyril. Even when judging the Tome of Pope Leo (the great western Christological statement, formally approved at Chalcedon), their criterion of orthodoxy remained agreement with Cyril; this is clear throughout the lengthy discussion of the Tome in the fourth session" (Price and Gaddis 2007, I.65). Commenting on the objections raised against the *Tome* and Theodoret's defense of Leo, he claims, "Nothing could be more indicative of the mood of the council than the fact that even Theodoret had to defend the Tome by appealing to the authority of Cyril" (2007, I.66). Even more poignantly, Price contends, "It is to misconceive the mood of the council to think of the Definition as attempting a synthesis between Cyril's theology and that of the Antiochene school.... The fathers only accepted from Antioch what they knew Cyril had not only tolerated but also made his own" (2007, I.66).

Price continues,

It would also be a mistake to interpret the Definition as a synthesis between Alexandria and Rome.... If we take Leo's Christology as our starting point, a very different interpretation of the Definition emerges. But this was certainly not envisaged by the

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<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Weinandy's summary statement that the Chalcedonian Definition "must be read through the eyes of Cyril. His teaching is the hermeneutical principle that governs the proper interpretation of Chalcedon" (2015, 560).

council fathers themselves: they interpreted the Tome as simply a confirmation of the insistence ... that Christ is consubstantial both with the Father and with us men, and that therefore there are two natures in Christ that remain distinct even after the union.... In all, despite the formal approval of the Tome by the eastern bishops both before the council, at the council, and in the Definition itself, it remained far less important for them than the conciliar letters of Cyril. (2007, I.67)

Price argues further that in the mind of the Chalcedonian delegates, the two natures of the Formula of Reunion are understood as “contrasting attributes possessed by the same subject,” a claim that he supports by pointing out that the Definition does not state that two natures were united but that “the distinctive character of each nature” comes together. He insists that Chalcedon views this single subject not as a combination of deity and humanity but as the Logos himself, because the one who is “one and the same” is described with titles that cannot be applied to a divine/human composite—“Only-begotten” and “Word.”<sup>20</sup> Price asserts that this is not a symmetrical portrayal of Christ, but one that echoes the Nicene Creed’s affirmation that the subject of the incarnate experiences is “one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Finally, he concludes, “In all, the ‘one hypostasis’ of the Definition is indeed the eternal Word—not separated from the manhood, but the Word incarnate, that is a personal subject divine in his own nature and existing from all eternity, who adopted and made his own a second, human nature and all the qualities and experiences of that nature” (2007, I.69–71).

If Price is correct here, the implications are significant. In contrast to Grillmeier’s assessment focusing on language derived from a variety of sources and leaving the question of metaphysical models of the incarnation fairly open, Price’s conclusion quoted immediately above provides a blueprint for analyzing the incarnation. This assessment calls for us to begin not from natures and how they are united, nor even from the general question of what a “person” and a “nature” are, but instead from the concrete, eternally-existent person of the Logos. The divine nature is that which the Logos has and always has had; the human nature is that which he made his own in order to experience human life and accomplish our redemption. Scholars have almost always understood *Cyril* in this way, but Price argues that *Chalcedon*—often regarded either as Antiochene or as a synthesis of various emphases—must be understood in this way as well.

With such a Cyrillian reading of Chalcedon as background, Price naturally sees Constantinople II along similar lines. In his introduction to this council, he is even more direct in his insistence that the “Antiochene school” was not well-represented in the early church. He calls it the “so-called ‘School of Antioch,’” a “misleading term if we imagine an institution of any kind or a theological tradition of long standing, or if we imagine that all the Christians of Antioch, let alone all of Syria, were its adherents” (2009, I.61).<sup>21</sup> Writing of the post-Chalcedonian Christology that led to Constantinople II, he avers:

The term ‘neo-Chalcedonianism’ is useful to refer to sixth-century developments in Christology, but it has been used to suggest that there was a contrast between the form of Chalcedonianism dominant in the sixth century and the original meaning of Chalcedon itself.... My own interpretation ... is that the Chalcedonian Definition,

<sup>20</sup> For similar interpretations of the significance of these “one and the same” statements, see Fairbairn 2003, 221; Weinandy 2015, 560.

<sup>21</sup> I have argued that neither John Chrysostom nor John of Antioch should be considered Antiochene (Fairbairn 2003, 204–11; 2007b), and even that large portions of what Theodoret wrote should not be considered Antiochene (2007a).

despite its non-Cyrrillian assertion of two natures after the union, expresses an essentially Cyrrillian Christology. Therefore I see the unambiguously Cyrrillian Christology of neo-Chalcedonianism as a valid clarification of Chalcedon, involving a certain shift of emphasis but no change in meaning. The miaphysite rejection of Chalcedon as Nestorian showed that the definition was open to misinterpretation.... I would therefore argue that the canons of 553, so far from narrowing or distorting the vision of Chalcedon, imported a welcome clarification, and one that the great majority of the fathers of Chalcedon, Cyrrillian in their loyalties, would have applauded. (2009, I.73–4)

This assessment contrasts sharply with both the pendulum-swing and synthesis-of-emphases patterns for interpreting the councils. And yet again, Price offers a blueprint for analysis of the incarnation. He writes, “If we start with the distinction between the two natures, it is to be doubted whether we shall ever succeed in truly uniting them.... A better starting point is the concept of person and the idea of a realization, or expression, of a person on a variety of ontological levels. In the canon of 553 just quoted [Canon 2] the distinction between two natures is redefined in terms of two aspects of the history of a single person—the Second Person of the Trinity, God the Word” (2009, I.75).

## 5. Assessing the Patterns of Interpretation

As I consider these three patterns of interpretation, I would like to make two brief, general comments and then provide a more extended discussion of one particularly salient issue for analytic theologians, the question of Chalcedon’s relation to Leo’s *Tome*.

### 5.1 The Movement of Interpretive Patterns

The first general comment is that the three patterns I have described do not simply constitute options for interpreting conciliar Christology. Instead, they constitute a genuine movement in the history of scholarly interpretation of that Christology. The pendulum-swing approach was to some degree a nineteenth-century rejection of the historic understanding of a normative and consistent conciliar Christology—one in favor of a view in which Antiochene Christology was superior but was opposed by much of the eastern church. This approach is hardly a live option for scholars who truly value conciliar Christology as a whole, who see something both inherently consistent and inherently normative about the church’s Christology from the fifth through the seventh centuries. Therefore, it is not surprising that in the twentieth century, the pendulum-swing pattern gave way to a synthesis-of-emphases pattern—one that accepted the premise of competing Antiochene and Alexandrian Christologies while still insisting that the church found a genuine consensus by achieving a synthesis between them. One can see the movement toward this pattern as a partial re-establishment of the historic view that the Ecumenical Councils were in fact consistent and normative, after the rejection of the latter view in the nineteenth century. Finally, more recent scholarship has moved toward a Cyrrillian pattern for interpreting conciliar Christology, in which the church’s consensus is seen as being both deeper and broader. Rather than merely balancing unity and duality in Christ, the Church focused on the eternal person of the Logos as the one who possesses both divine and human characteristics and as the agent who acts in Christ’s life and to whom the human experiences

of Christ happen. Much more than the synthesis-of-emphases pattern, the Cyrillian pattern implies that conciliar Christology makes metaphysical prescriptions about the way we may describe the incarnation, and analytic theologians who value conciliar Christology should note that this Cyrillian pattern represents a growing, even ascendant, movement of interpretation by patristic scholars over the past half-century.

## 5.2 The Significance of Richard Price's Work

My second general comment is that it is particularly significant that Richard Price emphatically holds to the Cyrillian interpretation of conciliar Christology. If we are looking for the spirit of patristic and conciliar Christology—if we are looking for the deep and broad consensus that may lie beneath the many disputes, varied concepts, and confusing uses of language—then we need to rely not merely on specialists who have delved deeply into the thought of one ancient writer or one issue or one council, but on scholars who have drunk deeply from the entire well of patristic contemplation about Christ across centuries, geographic regions, and languages. There is perhaps no one who has spent more time with the conciliar documents over the last few decades than Price, no one who has read them either as deeply or—more important—as broadly. Price is in a virtually unique position to claim with credibility that one would misread the mood of Chalcedon if one were to see it as a synthesis of Cyrillian and Antiochene emphases.

## 5.3 Chalcedon and Leo's *Tome*

Finally, I come to the relation between Leo's *Tome* and Chalcedon, an issue epitomized by the famous statement in the *Tome* that I have summarized above and that I now quote verbatim: "For each form performs what is proper to it in association with the other, the Word achieving what is the Word's while the body accomplishes what is the body's; the one shines with miracles while the other has succumbed to outrages."<sup>22</sup> This statement appears to make space for metaphysical models that treat the humanity of Christ as an agent that can act and be acted on without those actions either constituting the actions of the Word or happening to the Word. Theologians who believe this theoretical space is important while still valuing conciliar Christology may be inclined to treat this statement as the lynchpin of Leo's *Tome* and to believe that since the *Tome* was accepted at Chalcedon, this statement is central to the way we should interpret Chalcedon. Moreover, Constantinople III prominently quoted this passage from the *Tome* in its Definition of Faith,<sup>23</sup> a fact that furthers the impression that the statement should be regarded as central. However, as Price, Weinandy, and others argue, and as we shall see momentarily, centering this statement is certainly a misreading of the sentiment of Chalcedon toward Leo's *Tome*, and it is arguably even a misreading of the *Tome* itself. Let us look carefully at the way the delegates handled Leo's *Tome*.

During the second session of Chalcedon, five documents were read out publicly and incorporated into the acts of the council: The Creed from Nicaea 325, The Creed from Constantinople 381 (Nicene Creed), Cyril's second letter to Nestorius (*Ep.* 4), Cyril's letter to John of Antioch agreeing to the Formula of Reunion (*Ep.* 39), and Leo's *Tome*. As the acts are

<sup>22</sup> This wording follows the Greek from *Acts of Chalcedon* 3.25 (*ACO* 2.1.2.82; Price and Gaddis 2007, II.25). For the Latin as Leo wrote it, see *ACO* 2.2.1.28 (see also Tanner 1990, 79).

<sup>23</sup> *Acts of Constantinople III* 18 (*ACO*<sup>2</sup> 2.2.776; Tanner 1990, 129).

presented, each document is followed by stylized acclamations of agreement.<sup>24</sup> These acclamations are not identical but concur in tenor—the delegates affirm the document just read to be consistent with the faith of the church. It is in the context of such stylized agreement that the famous statement “Peter has uttered this through Leo” is acclaimed of Leo’s *Tome*.<sup>25</sup> But two important things must be noted. First, there is no mention of any dissenting voices regarding the other four documents. They are read and accepted with apparent unanimity. Only the reading of the *Tome* is greeted with objections. Second, as presented in the acts, the objections come *after* the affirmations of agreement; even so, the acts indicate that the objections arose and were dealt with *during* the reading of the *Tome*, and thus *before* the acclamations of agreement.

The acts indicate that as three particular passages from the *Tome* (including the one we are considering now) were being read, objections were raised. In these three instances, the acts note that as a certain passage was read, some bishops objected, and the objection was handled by reading a passage from Cyril.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, it seems that in real time, the objections and the responses to them interrupted the reading of the *Tome* in three places, and therefore, at the time the acclamations were given, the objections had already been addressed.

The fact that each of the three offending passages in the *Tome* was handled in the same way, by reading aloud a passage from Cyril himself in which he wrote something similar to what Leo had written, clearly indicates that Cyril was the standard against which Leo was being judged. Significantly, this most famous objectionable passage (claiming that each form performs what is proper to itself) was addressed by reading from a passage in which Cyril explained his attitude toward the Formula of Reunion. Cyril wrote: “Some of the sayings [attributed to Christ] are particularly fitting to God [*theoprepeis*], some again are particularly fitting to man [*anthropoprepeis*], while others occupy a middle position, revealing the Son of God as God and man simultaneously and at the same time.”<sup>27</sup> The reading of this quotation from Cyril interprets Leo’s statement not as an assertion that each form is an independent agent, but instead as an assertion that *theoprepeis* and *anthropoprepeis* things may both be said of the Son of God after the incarnation. In Cyril’s statement, the subject in Christ is clearly the Logos. And very strikingly, the delegates had to read Leo’s potentially ambiguous statement in light of Cyril’s to find it acceptable.

Later, the fourth session dealt further with Leo’s *Tome*, and while the acts preserve none of the actual deliberations, the summary statements indicate that the doubts about the *Tome* revolved around a few passages in which Leo appeared to separate deity and humanity and that the papal legates were able to convince the doubters that this was not Leo’s intention. (Of course, these would have been the three passages that were objected to in the second session, including the famous one we are considering now.) For example, a group of thirty-one bishops (their names are all listed) affirmed:

Concerning the letter sent by his beatitude [Leo] all our doubts have been resolved by the most holy bishops Paschasinus and Lucentius, representing the apostolic see, who have explained to us what the wording seemed to separate . . . we found their holinesses well able to resolve our doubts. For they anathematized every man who separates from

<sup>24</sup> For the reading of these documents and the acclamations, see *Acts of Chalcedon* 3.11–23 (*ACO* 2.1.2.79–81; Price and Gaddis 2007, II.12–25).

<sup>25</sup> *Acts of Chalcedon* 3.23 (*ACO* 2.1.2.81; Price and Gaddis 2007, II.24).

<sup>26</sup> *Acts of Chalcedon* 3.24–6 (*ACO* 2.1.2.81–2; Price and Gaddis 2007, II.25–6).

<sup>27</sup> *Acts of Chalcedon* 3.26 (*ACO* 2.1.2.82; Price and Gaddis 2007, II.26). The passage being quoted is from Cyril’s letter to Acacius of Melitene (*Ep.* 40) 16 (Wickham 1983, 52–3).

the Godhead the flesh of our Lord, God, and Saviour Jesus Christ, which he united to himself from the holy Virgin Mary the *Theotokos*, and who denies that he possesses both the divine and human attributes without confusion, change, or division.<sup>28</sup>

Notice that in this passage it is “our Lord, God, and Saviour Jesus Christ” who possesses divine and human attributes. The papal legates convinced the doubters that Leo did not mean that the divine and human natures were separate subjects possessing their own attributes and operating quasi-independently.

Likewise, another group of sixteen bishops (again, their names are listed) affirmed:

When the letter of the most blessed and God-beloved Leo archbishop of Rome was read to us, we assented to most of it as correct and in accord with the aforesaid [the other four documents read previously]; but some statements in it struck us as implying a separation and division for those who wish to think that way.... We were informed by the most holy fathers, bishops and presbyters, who represent the most God-beloved and holy Archbishop Leo, that they teach no division in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ but one and the same Lord the Son of God. Therefore we have assented and signed the Tome.<sup>29</sup>

Here again, the issue is an apparent separation, and this group of bishops was satisfied that Leo affirmed one and the same Lord, the Son of God. God’s eternal Son is the person of Christ, the one who acts and to whom the experiences happen.

Thus, we can see that the delegates at Chalcedon accepted the *Tome* by interpreting the assertion that each form does what is proper to itself in the sense that the one Lord, the Logos, acts in divine and human ways. Only once the delegates had interpreted the statement in this way were they willing to affirm that Peter had spoken through Leo. In fact, there is ample evidence in the *Tome* itself that Leo saw the acting subject of Christ as the Logos, and thus that the way the delegates at Chalcedon interpreted these statements was the way Leo himself meant them.<sup>30</sup>

A so-called “Antiochene” reading of Leo’s *Tome*, in which the two natures act independently and thus constitute virtually separate acting subjects, is key to an Antiochene reading of Chalcedon, which itself is central to either a pendulum-swing or a synthesis-of-emphases reading of conciliar Christology as a whole. But as we have just seen, an Antiochene reading of Leo’s *Tome* was not acceptable to the delegates present at Chalcedon. They accepted the *Tome* by reading it—correctly, in my opinion—as a document in line with Cyril, a document that treats the Logos as the acting subject in Christ. Reading the *Tome* in this way—as the delegates certainly did—implies that Chalcedon should be seen in a Cyrillian way, which in turn implies that Constantinople II—a Cyrillian interpretation of Chalcedon—is not a departure but an extension of the thought of Chalcedon itself.

Furthermore, regarding the prominent place that this very passage from the *Tome* (about each form doing what is proper to itself) holds in the decrees of Constantinople III, it behooves us to remember that that council saw itself in line with the five previous ones and thus with the way Chalcedon (and, for that matter, Constantinople II) had interpreted this statement by Leo. Thus, we should probably regard the two natural wills (*thelemata*) and

<sup>28</sup> *Acts of Chalcedon* 4.9.67–98 (ACO 2.1.2.101–3; Price and Gaddis 2007, II.137–8).

<sup>29</sup> *Acts of Chalcedon* 4.9.99–114 (ACO 2.1.2.103; Price and Gaddis 2007, II.138–9).

<sup>30</sup> See Fairbairn 2003 (218–20) for a discussion of this evidence.

principles of action (*energeiai*) affirmed at Constantinople III<sup>31</sup> not as separate divine and human sources of action, but as principles on the basis of which the incarnate Son acts; he acts in *theoprepeis* and *anthropoprepeis* ways. The Cyrillian (also called Neochalcedonian, Alexandrian, or even traditional) interpretation of conciliar Christology has much to commend it as the correct interpretation of a unified view of Christ throughout all the councils.

## 6. Concluding Implications

In this article I have sought to outline the primary ways patristics scholars have approached conciliar Christology, and in the process I have argued that the most plausible way to handle the Ecumenical Councils' own claim that they are consistent one with another is to view all of them in a Cyrillian manner—the Logos is the one active subject in the incarnate Christ. I would like to conclude by offering some possible implications for metaphysical models of the incarnation.

First, this understanding of conciliar Christology implies that it may be valuable to begin Christological analysis not with the natures (however understood) that were to be united, but with the eternal person of God's Son, the Logos. Remember that Price has argued this point directly in a passage quoted above (2009, I.75). Similarly, Weinandy asserts:

The incarnational 'becoming' is not the compositional union of natures which would demand change and mutation within both the divinity and the humanity, but rather the person of the Son taking on a new mode of existence as man. Such an understanding allows the Son to remain immutable as God in becoming man so as to ensure that it is truly God, in the fullness of his divinity, who is man, and equally ensures that the humanity is not changed, thus safeguarding that it is truly man that the Son of God is. (2000, 206)

Weinandy's statement does not necessarily reject all "compositional" models of the incarnation. What he seems to mean (and prohibit) by "compositional" is models in which two impersonal entities are combined to make a person. In contrast, if one is to speak of "composition," one needs to understand a composition that takes place in the person of the Son. He has always possessed the divine nature, and at the incarnation he takes into his own person a second, human nature.

Second, and closely related, I suggest that the spirit of conciliar Christology implies not simply a focus on what a *hypostasis* and a *physis* are, but also attention to who a person is. While it was certainly the case that philosophically minded church fathers like Basil and Gregory of Nyssa honed the understanding of *physis* and *hypostasis* as concepts and that these concepts were later applied to questions of Christology,<sup>32</sup> the concepts themselves did not exhaust what the church meant by saying that Father, Son and Spirit were three *hypostaseis/personae* and that Christ was a single *hypostasis/persona*. When writing of God and Christ, the fathers thought of

<sup>31</sup> *Acts of Constantinople III* 18 (ACO<sup>2</sup> 2.2.775–6; Tanner 1990, 128–9). Note that the delegates understand Christ's miracles and sufferings both pertaining to one and the same person but according to one or the other nature, and that they specifically name Cyril as the pattern for their way of understanding Christ's two wills.

<sup>32</sup> See the conflicting interpretations of Gregory of Nyssa's understanding of *ousia* and *hypostasis* in Zachhuber 2000 (61–118) (cf. Zachhuber [2020, 33–70]) and Cross 2002 (372–410).



a person not merely as a concrete reality (which could theoretically be an “it”), but also as a “he” (in contrast to an “it,” not in contrast to a “she”)—one who acts, one who is capable of interacting relationally with other personal beings, one who either can or cannot suffer depending on his nature, and indeed one who can suffer impassibly if he possesses both the impassible divine nature and a passible human nature. I suggest that metaphysical analysis of the incarnation could fruitfully explore the “who-ness” of divine and human personhood as well as the “what-ness” of hypostatic subsistence.

Third, and likewise closely related, this understanding of conciliar Christology suggests that the issue of freedom in connection with the incarnation might well be framed not as the freedom of Christ’s human nature to act (quasi-)independently of the divine Son, but as the *human* freedom of the *divine* Son to pursue the mission for which he came to earth—the redemption of the human race. If, in fact, Christological analysis can profit from a focus on starting with the divine Son and from considering the who-ness of personhood, it follows that the concept of freedom might be appropriately attached to the Son as an incarnate (and thus fully human) person, and not simply to his human nature considered on its own. Doing so might enhance our understanding of the differences, as well as the similarities, between Christ’s humanity and ours.

An increasing chorus of patristics scholars over the last half-century has been arguing that a Cyrillian understanding of the incarnate Savior was the consensus of the church. I believe such an understanding could be helpfully explored metaphysically in at least the three ways I have mentioned above, and I offer these suggestions in the service of the work of analytic theologians focusing on the incarnation.

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