

“In recent years, intense research has been directed at Christological and trinitarian themes with exciting and insightful results. *Jesus in Trinitarian Perspective* is on the cutting edge of this research because it is the only volume to approach these themes in a multidisciplinary perspective. Faithful to Scripture and Chalcedon yet creative and fresh, Sanders and Issler have given the church a theologically rich and devotionally practical guide to the person and work of Christ. Pastors and informed laypeople will profit greatly from this book. Moreover, it would be my first choice as a text in Christology.”

J. P. Moreland (Ph.D., University of Southern California), Distinguished Professor of Philosophy, Biola University, and author of Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview (2003) and Kingdom Triangle (2007)

“The study of Jesus Christ is obviously important to all Christians. However, it is not obvious that he must be understood in light of the Trinity. We must reflect upon Jesus’ life and ministry in relationship to God, the Father, if we are rightly to appreciate and apply what Scripture says about him. Likewise, we need to consider the person and work of the Holy Spirit throughout Jesus’ life. *Jesus in Trinitarian Perspective* helps Christians to understand and appreciate the importance of the Trinity in considering Jesus—the life he lived, the salvation he provided, and the role model for how we should live and minister. The book provides clear-cut axioms for investigating the dynamics and significance of Jesus’ relationship to the Father and the Holy Spirit. Christians will benefit greatly from the variety of ways *Jesus in Trinitarian Perspective* explores who Jesus is, especially in light of who he is in relationship to God the Father and the Holy Spirit.

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AN INTRODUCTORY CHRISTOLOGY

JESUS
IN
TRINITARIAN
PERSPECTIVE

FRED SANDERS
& KLAUS ISSLER
FOREWORD BY GERALD BRAY



NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

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FOREWORD

No subject is more central to the Christian faith than the doctrine of Christ, which is set in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity. Whether these are two doctrines or one is hard to say; certainly, one could not exist without the other. In the early centuries of the Christian church, theologians and controversialists battled out the parameters required to express this teaching adequately. In the words of the *Quicumque vult* (Athanasian Creed): “For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord; So are we forbidden by the Catholic religion to say; There are three Gods or three Lords.” The “Christian verity” is the New Testament, which reveals the divinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The “Catholic religion” is the entire Bible, which insists that there is only one God. The result of this double affirmation is the doctrine of the Trinity, which reconciles the New Testament revelation with the whole of Scripture.

The Fathers of the church were never in any doubt about this. They borrowed the language of ancient philosophy and law in order to express their beliefs, but the Bible was always their guide. Formulations that proved inadequate to express its teaching were either rejected or modified until they did. The great achievement of the first four centuries of Christian history was to find a framework capable of accommodating both the divinity of Christ and the oneness of God. Later generations were able to build on this achievement to develop the great theme of atonement and to tie the person and work of the Holy Spirit into the overall picture. Not everyone came on board with every aspect of this development, and there are still some historical divisions that have been stubbornly resistant to all attempts to overcome them. The non-Chalcedonian churches of the East have never accepted the “one person in two natures” formula for expressing the divinity of Christ, nor have the Eastern churches been able to affirm the double procession of the Holy Spirit, that is to say, his procession from the Son as well as from the Father. But Protestant Christians at least are united on these matters, which continue to play an essential part in the construction of our theology.

Gerald Bray

The contributors to this volume have not been afraid to revisit ancient debates, nor have they hesitated to tease out their implications for our own beliefs and proclamation. They are to be congratulated for their courage and admired for both their learning and their discernment. In this book they speak to the central issues of our faith, and in doing so, they stir us up to greater devotion. “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us,” and it was in that flesh that we have seen the glory of God revealed. May he grant us the grace to persevere in our search for greater understanding, and bless both the authors who teach and the readers who learn more about the One who came in the flesh for our salvation.

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INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTOLOGY

Chalcedonian Categories for the Gospel Narrative

Fred Sanders

Chapter Summary

Christology begins as an intellectual attempt to account for the mystery of salvation that every Christian experiences, but it is a task that demands the labors of biblical, historical, philosophical, systematic, and practical theologians. We are living in an age when contemporary theologians have begun appropriating the conceptual wealth of the great tradition of Christian doctrine, and Christian philosophers are turning their attention to examining the doctrinal content of Christian truth claims. This situation makes possible an interdisciplinary investigation of a new kind. The fourth ecumenical council, Chalcedon (451), is widely accepted as a standard of orthodox thought on Christology, and this chapter briefly explains the logic of Chalcedon. However, Chalcedon raises questions that are answered by the next ecumenical council, Constantinople II (553). This post-Chalcedonian Christology, representing a clarification of Cyrillian insights that were implied but not directly stated at Chalcedon, yields an anhypostatic-enhypostatic Christology. More importantly, it puts the two-natures categories of Chalcedon back into motion by affirming identity between the second person of the Trinity and the person who is the subject of the incarnation, providing the conceptual catego-

ries evangelicals need to tell the story of their personal savior the way they need to. He is one of the Trinity, and he died on the cross.

Axioms for Christological Study

1. Christology is an interdisciplinary theological project requiring insight from biblical, historical, philosophical, practical, and systematic theologians.
2. To think rightly about the Trinity, the incarnation, or the atonement, the theologian must think about them all at once, in relation to each other.
3. The good news of Jesus the Savior presupposes the long story of the eternal Son of God's entering into human history, and the doctrinal categories provided by Chalcedon are a helpful conceptual resource for making sense of it.

KEY TERMS

ecumenical council	philosophical theology	historical theology
patristics	biblical theology	practical theology
systematic theology	constructive theology	theanthropic person
hypostatic union	Chalcedonian Definition	person
nature	Cyrrillian	Cyril of Alexandria
anathema	dyophysites/diphysitism/ two-nature	anhypostatic/ enhypostatic Christology
Heresies	Arianism	Apollinarianism
	Nestorianism	Eutychian monophysitism
Greek terms	<i>homoousios</i> <i>taxis</i>	<i>hypostasis</i>

Christology is one of the most difficult doctrines in all of theology, perhaps second only to the doctrine of the Trinity. Since the goal of this book is to explore the theological project of Christology accessibly and at an introductory level, what sense does it make to combine one difficult doctrine with another? Putting Christology into trinitarian perspective sounds like multiplying complexity times complexity, or explaining one unclear thing by another thing even more unclear: *obscurum per obscurius!* For the sake of analytic clarity, it would seem more promising to isolate the doctrine of Christ as strictly as possible from all other considerations and make sense of it on its own terms first. But the thesis of this book, and the conviction of each author, is that the intellectual work of Christology is best undertaken in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Even at the introductory level, trinitarian resources best equip the student of theology to grasp Christian teaching on the incarnation, person, and work of Christ. We could say many things about Jesus and the salvation available through him, but the logic built in to the central Christian truths requires us to confess what the fifth ecumenical council said in the year 553: “that our lord Jesus Christ, who was crucified in his human flesh, is truly God and the Lord of glory and one of the members of the holy Trinity.”¹ To say the truth about Jesus, we must keep him in trinitarian perspective and say, with this ancient council, that one of the Trinity died on the cross.

Recognizing Jesus as one of the Trinity is a conceptual breakthrough that throws light on all the great central beliefs of Christianity. The six chapters of this book explore the implications of Jesus’ identity as one of the Trinity, tracing the long arc from God’s eternal being to humanity’s redemption. We begin (insofar as is humanly possible, and strictly on the basis of God’s self-revelation) above all worlds in the homeland of the Trinity, with a richly elaborated doctrine of the eternal Trinity as an interpersonal fellowship of structured relations among the perfectly coequal Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Horrell, chap. 2). From that height we trace the act of infinite condescension in which the preexistent eternal Son of

¹ Tanner, “Constantinople II, 553,” in *NL*, 118, quoting from *Anathema* 10. The word *members* is not represented in the Greek text and should not be thought of as a technical term, but was added by the translator to make a smoother English reading.

God becomes the incarnate Son of God by taking on a full human nature. The resulting doctrine of the person of Christ is elaborated with guidance from the church fathers (Fairbairn, chap. 3), and its terms are clarified, disciplined, and disambiguated by analytic philosophy (DeWeese, chap. 4). Because the incarnation took place “for us and for our salvation,” as the Nicene Creed states, we complete the trajectory by attending to the way the incarnate Logos accomplished our redemption in his death and resurrection (Ware, chap. 5), and how, as the Son, he is the example of a truly human life of faith, radical dependence on God, and being filled with the Holy Spirit (Issler, chap. 6).

In this introductory chapter, I will do four things. First, I will explain why it takes an interdisciplinary team of authors—three systematicians, a historical theologian, a philosophical theologian, and a practical theologian—to put Jesus into trinitarian perspective and make the case that one of the Trinity died on the cross. Second, I will summarize the classic ground rules laid down in the logic of the fourth ecumenical council’s Chalcedonian Definition of 451 for thinking biblically about Jesus: that he is one person in two unmixed, unconfused, undivided natures. Third, I will argue that contemporary Evangelical theology can and should take one step beyond Chalcedon, embracing as well the guidance of the fifth ecumenical council (Constantinople II, 553), which took the decisive step of placing Christology in its proper trinitarian context. Finally, I will summarize the five remaining chapters and give an overview of the way they relate to one another and to the total project of placing Christology in trinitarian perspective.

Saying Everything at Once

A preliminary question may already be forming in the minds of some readers: Why take on such a difficult task as this? Could such an extended theological project possibly be of any assistance for Christians in living faithfully and carrying out the work committed to the church in our time? Or is a detailed book on Christology in trinitarian perspective merely an academic exercise with no bearing on Christians outside the confines of scholarship? Could an argument covering so much doctrinal territory be relevant to the gospel?