CHALCEDON, AND THE SUBJECT IN CHRIST*

by

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CHRISTIANS engaged in the style of reflection known as 'systematic theology' have not infrequently advanced a position along the following lines: The correct account of things regarding Christ, God and human beings is this. The hypostasis of person or subject at issue in the case of Jesus Christ is divine, and is not (as such) human; whereas the hypostasis or person or subject at issue in the case of each of us is human, and is not divine'. I call that the 'Subject Divine and Not Human' Christological position. Supporters of this position tend to regard acceptance of it as intrinsic to affirming what is basic to Christian faith, namely 'the Incarnation' or 'the hypostatic union'.

One contemporary exponent of such a position is G. O'Collins, S.J., in his book Interpreting Jesus. At the core of his presentation for our day of Jesus Christ's identity, O'Collins writes: 'Such then is the doctrine of the "hypostatic union". A fully human existence was "enhypostatized" in the Word. Christ was not a human person, but a divine person who assumed a complete human nature without assuming human personhood.'

What assessment is one to make, in the light of all the relevant sources and criteria, of the 'Subject Divine and Not Human' position? Should one espouse it? Is any other more adequate position to hand? Such questions, which exercised our forebears in the Early Church, stand crucial in how Christian faith is to be articulated for today. Hence, and perhaps contrary to appearances, the questions are of considerable pastoral concern. Sound handling of these questions brings in a large and complex range of factors. The path of wisdom, after acknowledgement of that complexity, is to isolate and examine limited sets of factors — findings on which may then contribute to an overall outlook. The present article addresses just one group of the factors that are pertinent: to do with the bearing for our day of the Council of Chalcedon (451); and the bearing also — though the present perspective on this is highly restricted — of the Second Council of Constantinople (553).

People often take this view: 'The Council of Chalcedon main-

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of the fifth or sixth centuries being different from categories current today.

This article is in no way, let me stress, a comprehensive assessment of the 'Subject Divine and Not Human' position. My own positive Christological standpoint receives no elaboration. And I am not embarking on apologetics. The article constitutes a brief consideration of whether a Catholic Christian is bound in virtue of Chalcedon and/or of Constantinople II to hold — as the correct account — that the subject in Christ is divine, and is not (at root) human.

We may note that it is possible to discourse at length on the meanings which the words 'hypostasis', or 'person', or 'subject' have had in one or another context over the centuries: or again which these words do, or should, bear in speech today. Detailed attention can also be given to other expressions such as prosopon, persona, substantia, substance and subsistence; and to associated words such as ousia, physi, essence and nature. Some modern writers make statements to the effect that the terms 'person' or 'subject' are metaphysical, or ontological, categories, while the terms 'personality' or 'subjectivity' are psychological categories; and such statements can be examined. The expressions 'self', or 'ego', can be probed. Now these various studies have great value. If, however, what is intended as the central topic of the present article is actually to be reached and pursued within a manageable space, a lot of all that must here remain unsaid. Perhaps as a quick rule of thumb, one can take the word 'hypostasis' in mid-fifth-century theology to signify 'a concretely existing, distinct (or, independent), individual reality'. Plainly it is no innovation of mine, to employ the terms 'hypostasis', or 'person', or 'subject', in theologizing about Jesus Christ! And these three words are in fact treated as interchangeable (or apparently so) in various modern writings on Christ's identity.

1. THREE FAMILIAR STANCES

As an aid to our analysis, here is a sketch of three broad, contrasting types of stance on Christ which are familiar in Christian circles. What follows is manifestly crude.

Stance K. One subject: the divine Son or Word
Stance K is marked by these elements.

The Godhead comprises, eternally, three distinct hypostases or persons or subjects having in common one, divine, nature. The
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subjects are divine. (The subjects are Father, Son or Word, and Spirit.) That is the Trinity.

A human being consists of a hypostasis or person or subject having, in common with all other human beings, human nature. The subject is human.

The second subject of the Godhead (i.e., the Son or Word) — a divine subject, distinct from the Father — took on, two thousand years ago, an addition: namely, human nature. In this case, the case of Jesus Christ, the subject is divine, and is not (as such) human; whereas in the case of each of us, the subject is human, and is not divine. The subject in Jesus has a divine nature eternally. From two millennia ago this divine subject also has by acquisition a further set of properties, essential human properties. Those properties are what the phrase ‘human nature’ here designates. Jesus’s human nature is sinless. Thus uniquely in the case of Jesus there is one, divine, subject with two natures, divine and human. That is the Incarnation.

(But it has been common for the stance defined by those elements to be associated with particular ideas concerning: a primeval perfect situation of human beings — ‘creation’; a Fall into a dreadful situation; the Incarnation as an inbreaking and gulf-bridging exercise; and salvation as a restoration of the initial perfect stage plus a bonus. ‘Original sin’, people’s need for redemption, Christ’s atoning work, grace, reception by humans of ‘divine’ qualities, and Spirit, have all been able to portray in terms of these elements and ideas.)

The above stance is basically the christological outlook developed in Alexandria. The core of Cyril’s favoured approach is here conveyed. From the latter half of the first millennium until modern times, and in some influential circles to this day, this stance has been in the ascendant.

The position which at the start of this article I termed the ‘Subject Divine and Not Human’ position is, in effect, stance K (construed as the correct account).

Stance L. Two subjects: the divine Son or Word, and a human subject

Stance L resembles stance K as regards what the Godhead comprises and what a human being consists of. (With respect to further notions about the human situation, sin, salvation and so forth, some particular ideas which have often been linked with stance L are like those commonly associated with stance K, while others are not.)

Stance L proceeds thus: The second subject of the Godhead (i.e., the Son or Word) — a divine subject, distinct from the Father —

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became united two thousand years ago with a human subject; there being no moment in the life of this human subject when it was not so united with the divine subject. Only in the case of Jesus Christ, not in the case of any of the rest of us, is a human subject united in such a fashion with a divine subject. Hence just in the case of Christ there is a divine subject with a divine nature, and a human subject with a human nature; and it is the relation between these two realities — their conjunction, unification, together — which constitutes the oneness of Christ, Christ as a single reality. The will of the human subject never varies (or could vary) from the will of the divine subject: in that sense, there is one (same) will. A feature of the vital uniting relation is that if you look at Christ, what is presented, apparent, externally images perfectly the divine subject.

Not only does the previous paragraph reflect the grammatical structure of writings by prominent theologians whom we connect with Antioch. In a more thoroughgoing sense also, stance L approximates to the outlook of ‘Antiochene’ Christology.

The cross of the contrast in understanding of Christ as between Alexandria (Cyril) and Antioch is vividly brought out in the sketches of stances K and L just in turn supplied.

During the twentieth century a lot of scholars, including in recent decades various leading Catholic theologians, have found far more points of merit in stance L, despite its evident problems, than had for many centuries earlier been acknowledged.

Stance M. One subject: a human subject

According to stance M, Jesus Christ is one subject, a human subject, in the same kind of way that all the rest of us are human subjects. Within the broad structure of relationships between human beings and God — an analytical account of which can be termed a general anthropology — Jesus is an instance among other instances. In so far as God’s presence and activity amidst humans at large are characterized by phrases such as divine ‘self-communication’ or ‘self-expression’ or ‘Word’ or ‘grace’ or ‘Spirit’, those phrases readily hold of God’s presence and activity in Jesus. Relative to this scheme of analysis, respects may be identified in which the Jesus-God relationship is different from the relationships other human beings have with God. Language of ‘completeness’ or ‘fullness’, or of ‘paradigm’, or again of ‘what is intrinsic to God’s (eternal) nature’, may be adduced as apt just in the case of Jesus. So too, language of ‘divinity’ is liable to be applied somehow to Jesus, in a manner it is not applied to other human beings.

Such a stance does not posit the particular form of plurality within the Godhead which is integral to stances K and L. This is so,
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whatever else — on one or another permutation of stance M — may be said about God as differentiated, or as unitary.

In modern times (quite apart from what in the Early Church Paul of Samosata and others may have urged), various theories within this broad type have been propounded.

Further remarks

Study of texts on God, Christ and the human state by well-known theologians reveals assorted versions of these three broad types of stance, as well as notions going beyond them. Sometimes it is not clear to which (if any) of the three broad classes a particular theologian’s treatment belongs. Where that uncertainty holds, what is obscure may in part be how precisely terms like God’s ‘self-communication’ or ‘Word’, or (again) phrases about ‘distinctness’ between divine ‘hypostases’ or ‘persons’ or ‘subjects’, are to be understood when used by this particular writer; or even whether precision and consistency mark the writer’s usage at all.

In recognizing that it is a real question whether Catholic fidelity to Chalcedon and/or to Constantinople II requires acceptance — as the correct account — of the position that the subject in Christ is divine and is not human, i.e., of stance K, I am not suggesting that possibly a Catholic Christian is instead required by those councils, or is even permitted by them, to settle for stance L or again stance M. We should not in fact posit a priori that it is adequate to pick out any one of those three familiar stances as the correct account. Indeed, the very notion ‘the correct account’ needs to be applied circumspectly and in a complex fashion — even though any move totally to abandon it in favour of some outright christological agnosticism or indifferentism must be resisted.

2. THE BEARING OF CHALCEDON

The Chalcedonian Fathers, in their Definition of the Faith, stated that the Lord Jesus Christ is made known in two distinct natures (physis), which run together into one prosopon and one hypostasis.

Did the Council maintain that the one hypostasis here at stake just is the hypostasis of the divine Son or Word, and is not (at root) human? (Our examination spans the phrase ‘one prosopon’ also.)

Among current specialists on the patristic period, some give what amounts to a ‘yes’ to that question. A. Grillmeier, S.J., for example, in Christ in Christian Tradition, Volume I, speaks thus:

The sense of the dogma of Chalcedon is quite clear. The Fathers mean to say that while there is a real distinction between the natures of Godhead and manhood, Christ is still to be described as ‘one’, as ‘one person or hypostasis’. [The one Logos is the subject of both the human and the divine predicates. . . . The person of Christ does not first come into being from the concurrence of Godhead and manhood or of the two natures, but is already present in the person of the pre-existent Logos.9]

R. A. Norris, in his widely-studied article, ‘Toward a Contemporary Interpretation of the Chalcedonian Definition’, writes this:

[The Council’s] statement of its positive teaching . . . begins with an elaborate assertion of the unity of Christ. . . . The nature of this unity is then explained by the identification of Christ as the one divine Word, who was begotten of the Father before the ages. . . . Thus the one Christ whom the Council confesses is the divine Son himself. . . . [The governing principle of the Definition remains the same as Cyril’s. Christ is one . . . in the sense that the divine Word is the ‘who’, the substance, of all that Christ does. . . .]9 [Norris, perhaps unfortunately, employs the English term ‘substance’ to translate the Greek ‘hypostasis’].10

We may note that Norris advances this thesis about Chalcedon’s teaching in close conjunction with his idea that what Chalcedon provided was not a direct account of the constitution of the Person of Christ, a ‘metaphysical framework’, but rather a definition of the normative form of any statement about Christ, ‘a Christological grammar’.11 (Norris thinks that Chalcedon, in providing such a grammar, followed what — in Norris’s eyes — was the overriding, and innovative, concern of Cyril’s Christology.)12 I myself deem it imperative to differentiate sharply these two sorts of claim regarding Chalcedon. It is one thing to propose that Chalcedon specifies the logical structure proper to what we say about Christ, or a set of rules for how we should express the Christian understanding of Christ, rather than itself offering an account of an ontological reality, Christ. Even supposing acceptance of such a proposal (and I personally would accept only a proposal in a significantly modified vein),13 it is a further claim that the actual content of Chalcedon’s specification here is that along with saying ‘Christ is one, one hypostasis’, we must say also ‘the one hypostasis is that of the divine Word’.

Among scholars who pursue large-scale, systematic reflection on Christ, E. L. Mascali, for example, insists in his book Christ, the Christian and the Church that the classical Christian doctrine as it was formulated by the Council of Chalcedon . . . [was] ‘Two natures, a divine and a human, united in one divine Person . . . the divine Word’.14

Now it is vital to be clear about the extent of what is at issue. If you do estimate Chalcedon to have held that the one hypostasis in Christ just is (at root) the hypostasis of the pre-existent divine
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Word, you are ipso facto estimating that at the crux of the contrast between Alexandrian, Cyrilline Christology — as in stance K — and the Christology of Theodore, John of Antioch and Theodoret, as well as Nestorius — as in stance L — Chalcedon came down squarely on the side of the former approach against the latter.

On the evidence, are such estimates sound? In principle, a vast array of matters could relevantly be discussed. For present purposes, and with no claim to exhaustiveness, I indicate six sets of factors which in my judgement fittingly prompt forbearance from making those estimates.

(i) Context. Insight into Chalcedon’s orientation is fostered by attention to the historical context of the Council. At Ephesus in 431, Cyril, having declined to wait for the arrival of John of Antioch and others of like mind, readily secured the elimination of Nestorius himself as a power on the scene. In 433, Cyril and John of Antioch agreed on a statement, ‘the Formula of Reunion’, which had in fact been drawn up by John. This statement was a compromise between Alexandria and Antioch, with wording importantly different from Cyril’s favoured style of formulation. Why did that not settle matters? Why did the 451 Council take place at all? Cyril himself had great difficulty inducing some of his own supporters to accept the Formula of Reunion of 433. They felt that this statement betrayed their standpoint. After Cyril’s death, people in that mould, who sought to preserve or even harden the intransigent line taken earlier by Cyril in his Third Letter to Nestorius and in his Anathemas, came to prominence, notably Dioscorus and Eutyches. Such people’s forceful promotion of their outlook both disturbed Pope Leo of Rome, whose ‘Tome’ to Flavian was specifically directed against Eutyches, and also ran counter to the wishes of the man who became Emperor in 450, Marcian. The impetus to having a fresh council in 451 at Chalcedon was not as such to condemn Nestorius (that had been done already in 431), or to create de novo a compromise statement (there already was one, from 433), but in particular to react against hard-line Alexandrian, pro-Cyrilline, tendencies. It would thus have been a remarkable switch in direction if on the crucial point of debate the Chalcedonian Fathers had, in their eventual Definition, come down firmly on the side of Cyrilism, against even moderate Antiochenes.

(ii) Structure. The structure of what can be considered the key formulation within Chalcedon’s Definition is highly significant. The full passage may usefully be brought before us. Following, therefore, the holy Fathers, we all with one voice teach that it should be confessed that our Lord Jesus Christ is one and the same Son, the same perfect in Godhead, the same perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, the same consisting of a rational soul and a body; the

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same of one essence (homoousias) with the Father as regards his Godhead, the same of one essence (homoousias) with us as regards his manhood; like us in all things, except sin; begotten of the Father before the ages as regards his Godhead, the same in the last days, for us and for our salvation, begotten of Mary the Virgin Theokotos as regards his manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, made known in two natures (physises), which exist without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the difference of the natures being by no means abolished because of the union, but rather the characteristic property of each nature being preserved, and both running together into one prosopon and one hypostasis — not parted or divided into two prostasia, but one and the same Son, Only-begotten, divine Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets of old have spoken concerning him and as the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, and as the Creed of the Fathers has handed down to us.

Now in Cyril’s favoured linguistic formulae, a phrase such as ‘the (divine) Word’, or again ‘the hypostasis’ or the ‘physis’ of the Word, comprises the grammatical subject; and the remainder of the formula tells what has happened to, or in the career of, this subject. For example, ‘The Word united to himself flesh . . . kath’ hypostasis’ (i.e., in a way involving the sort of oneness which marks a concrete, independent, individual reality); the one hypostasis of the Word, that has become incarnate’, ‘the one physis of the (divine) Word, that has become incarnate’. These patterns of language express, for Cyril, the reality, the ontology, of the situation.

The structure of Chalcedon’s key formulation is strikingly different. (Chalcedon echoes, in this, the character of the Formula of Reunion.) Here the principal figure, subject, to which all that is confessed relates is — grammatically — ‘our Lord Jesus Christ’. A few lines before the passage I quoted occur the words, ‘The synod opposes those who presume to rend asunder the mystery of the economy into a duality of Sons’. The phrase ‘one and the same Son’ which is applied to Jesus Christ early in the quoted, key passage serves to continue and highlight that theme that for the Council only one Son is at stake, not two; the phrase does not entail that this one Son is just divine. (See also [vii] below.) Then in the passage come, in symmetrical fashion, successive ascriptions to the principal figure, namely our Lord Jesus Christ, of what is divine and what is human. To the one (grammatical) subject, Jesus Christ, are applied two classes of attributes, or two groups of predicates, divine and human respectively. The language has a static character. The passage is patently not couched as an account, or narrative, of the career of the divine Word; or as an allocation of divine and human predicates to the Word. (We may note that the actual term ‘Word’ appears only late in the passage.) The style of
this key formulation, and the plainly deliberate *contrast* with Cyril's favoured style of portrayal, count strongly against the view that Chalcedon maintained the one subject of all that is confessed to be, logically and/or ontologically, just a divine subject. 

(iii) *Homoousios with us.* The statement by Chalcedon, here repeating the Formula of Union, that Jesus Christ is not only 'homoousios with the Father', but also 'homoousios with us', marks a major development in official faith-articulation from where Nicaea had left matters. The single *homoousios* of the Nicene creed could not implausibly be construed as lending support to an Alexandrian, stance K, approach. Chalcedon's double *homoousios*, together with the sharp distinction between *ousia* plus *physis* on the one hand and *hypostasis* on the other (compare the alignment of *ousia* and *hypostasis* in the anathema adjoining the creed of Nicaea), affords no scope to such a construction.

(iv) *In two natures.* Whereas the draft statement of the faith put to the bishops at the *start* of the fifth session of the Council in 451 said 'made known *ek duo physeon*, i.e., *out of or from* two natures, the wording was changed during that session to the phrase which appears in the final Definition, *en duo physeisin*, i.e., *in two* natures. This change was at the instigation of Leo's legates, some Syrian and other ('Antiochene') bishops, and then the Emperor. Eutyches and Dioscorus had opposed talk of there being *two physes* ongoing in Christ, apparently regarding any such talk as prejudicing Christ's oneness and divine status. And their opposition to such talk could certainly derive encouragement from some of Cyril's prominent motifs, even though other elements in Cyril's writings are more nuanced. The change during Chalcedon's proceedings from 'out of' to 'in' two natures was designed to express dissociation from this hard-line Cyrillism, and to facilitate a fresh conceptuality of twoness and oneness in Christ. The change tends towards rebuttal of any notion that the Chalcedonian Definition came down squarely on the side of a rigid Alexandrian outlook concerning the texture of Christ's oneness. 

(v) *One hypostasis.* The Definition’s phraseology that as regards Jesus Christ just one *prosopon* and hypostasis is at stake, not two, plainly reflects Cyril’s stress, against Nestorius, that Christ’s *unicity is the sort of oneness which marks a single hypostasis: that of a concrete, independent, individual reality — *hen ti*. In other words, for Chalcedon, as for Cyril, the kind of oneness in Christ is not simply that accommodated by the notions of *schesis* (relation) or *sunaphesia* (conjunction). This is a major determination by the Council. The given phrase, however, by no means entails a further point, that the distinct, individual reality as issue is divine and is not human. 

*(vi) One and the same Son.* The actual phrase *hena kai ton auton huios* occurs twice within Chalcedon’s key formulation, and *huios* appears another time also. As was noted in (ii) above, the Definition shortly before this passage voices opposition to the idea that there are somehow two Sons — in effect, an eternal divine Son and a human Son. And the words ‘one and the same Son’ early in the key passage re-emphasize the singleness of the Sonship, without assigning what is thus professed just to the divine — or just to the human — category. Later on, the expression ‘one and the same Christ, Son . . .’ appears immediately prior to ‘made known in two natures’. Then, after the statement that the two natures run together into one *prosopon* and one hypostasis, come the words, *ouk eis duo prosopon merigomenon kai dialoumenon, all hena kai ton auton huios monogenê theon logon kurion kai troun Christion.* Now the finer points of how those words are to be understood, and rendered in English, are by no means clear-cut, as is witnessed by the variations hereabouts across translations of the Definition supplied in familiar English works. Are *monogenê* and *theon* respectively to be presented as having an adjectival function, and, if so, with regard to what noun(s)? Or are they to be taken as themselves nouns? And so on. The fact that ‘one and the same Son’ occurs immediately after the rejection of division into *two prosopeta* might be thought to suggest that here again, as in the initial instance of the phrase, the thrust is stress on oneness. The expressions *monogenê*, *theon* and *logon*, grouped together, throw into relief that the single concrete reality at stake is indeed divine. But that seems simply to be an accentuation at this particular juncture of a divinity which the bishops affirm throughout the key passage along with throughout affirming the single reality to be human also. A detailed textual study would among other things explore assorted fifth-century usages of the terms in question; and again would examine whether within the Definition itself the word ‘Son’ is always employed with the same set of associations. For the present, we may note that nothing we have surveyed dictates that even with the final occurrence of *huios* in the passage, let alone with the two earlier occurrences, an exclusively divine reality is posited.

In the light of the six sets of factors just reviewed, as well as of other considerations, the best judgement is, I think, that Chalcedon did not, at the heart of what vexed fifth-century Christology, side solidly with a Cyrilline, as against an Antiochene, approach; and did not maintain — or insist on Christians saying — that the one hypostasis in Christ is just divine (the hypostasis of the Word) and is not human.

We may advert to two of the contemporary scholars whose view of Chalcedon harmonizes with that assessment. H. Chadwick, in
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his preface (in English) to the recent French edition of the Chalcedonian documents, comments with respect to the terminology of one prosopon and one hypostasis,

Here again the Definition is remarkable for its imprecision. It does not prescribe or even hint that the one hypostasis is that of the divine Word.32

W. Kasper writes in Jesus the Christ regarding Chalcedon,

There was no place for Cyril's dynamic christological idea of the hegemony of the Logos within the apparently symmetrical scheme of two natures which meet in one person. ... The Chalcedon dogma was ... without further definition of the term 'person' and its ontological content.33

As I intimated earlier, the judgement that Chalcedon did not maintain that the one hypostasis in Christ is divine and is not human by no means implies a claim that for Chalcedon the one hypostasis is human and is not divine, or again a claim that for the Council there are after all two hypostases, divine and human. In fact, the Chalcedon to exclude both those latter claims. The Chalcedonian bishops had before them two conceptual schemes (one Alexandrian, the other Antiochen), each possessing a measure of internal consistency, but mutually conflicting. The Council did not opt straightforwardly for one or other scheme. It held on to particular elements to be found in the respective schemes; but, amidst in effect breaking beyond existing categories, it left those elements - at least so far as surface ideas go - in an unresolved tension. How Chalcedon may best be construed today within an overall, positive standpoint, a standpoint which includes themes concerning knowledge, language and reality, is a further matter.34

3. THE BEARING OF CONSTANTINOPLE II

People frequently think that whatever Chalcedon's attitude may have been, the Second Council of Constantinople definitely maintained that the subject in Christ is divine and is not (at root) human: such that anyone today seeking to accord the Council of 553 the status which Catholic Christianity entails must on this count, at any rate, accept the 'Subject Divine and Not Human' position.

It may be noted that G. O'Collins, two sentences before the passage endorsing the 'Subject Divine and Not Human' position which was cited at the start of this article, says, 'The Second Council of Constantinople ... interpreted the unity of Christ by identifying the principle of union as the pre-existing Logos'.35 E. L. Mascall writes, 'the Fifth Ecumenical Council, Constantinople II,'

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... [clearly held that] the person, the prosopon or hypostasis, of Christ is the pre-existent Son and Word of the Father.36

In June 553, during the last session of the Council, the bishops assembled at Constantinople approved — so we may recall — fourteen anathematizing canons. Particularly striking formulations, relative to our present interests, are canons 1, 2 and 5.37

Canon 1: If anyone does not confess that the Son of God, the Holy Spirit, and the Father, one Godhead to be worshipped in three hypostases or prosopon, anathema sit. For one is the Father and the Father from whom all things are, one is the Lord Jesus Christ through whom all things are, and one the Holy Spirit in whom all things are.

Canon 2: If anyone does not confess two births of the Word of God, one from the Father before the ages which is timeless and incorporeal, the other in the latter days when the same [Word], descending from heaven, was made flesh from Mary, the holy and glorious Mother of God ever Virgin, and was born of her, anathema sit.

Canon 3: If anyone understands the one hypostasis of our Lord Jesus Christ as admitting the meaning of several hypostases, and so tries to introduce into the mystery of Christ two hypostases or two prosopai, and does not confess that the Word of God has been united to the flesh in a way that pertains to hypostasis (kath' hypostasis) and that, therefore, there is but one hypostasis or prosopon, and that this is the sense in which the holy Council of Chalcedon confessed one hypostasis of our Lord Jesus Christ, anathema sit. For the Holy Trinity has no prosopon or hypostasis adjointed to it, even by the Incarnation of God the Word, one of the Holy Trinity.

Now on the premise that the canons just quoted express valid judgements of an ecumenical council of the Church, there is, it seems to me, a prima facie case that Catholic Christians should on this ground hold the 'Subject Divine and Not Human' position. Assuming acceptance of the premise stated, it is possible and important to consider whether that prima facie case can convincingly be rebutted or disarmed.38 Pursuit of such an investigation, however, would extend beyond what is practicable in the present article.

My limited aim for the present is to bring out that actual acceptance of the correctness of the premise is itself far from unproblematic. My concern here, in other words, is to air certain queries which arise about the very status in Catholic Christianity of canon 2 and 5 of the assembly of 553, and about whether those canons are included within the bounds of that to which Catholic Christians (by definition) properly adhere. It is a familiar principle of Catholic Christian theology that, without the Pope's ratification, there is no valid decision by an ecumenical council.39 The main questions in this regard which come up with respect to 553 are: Was Pope
Vigilius free of duress, such that he genuinely consented to formulations passed by the bishops? And: In so far as the Pope genuinely consented to anything, did the range of what he approved embrace canons 1 to 10? The tangled issues of history, theology of revelation and ecclesiology which we here touch on may not fittingly be avoided by anyone seriously appraising the bearing of the Council of 533 on essential tenets of Catholica Christology.

The background to the assembly of 533 may be called to mind. In the East during the later fifth, and the sixth, centuries the most influential forces within the Great Church strongly favoured Alexandrian, Cyriline conceptions of Jesus Christ, and interpreted Chalcedon very much in terms of such conceptions. Ideas were sharpened that Christ’s human nature is without a human hypostasis (is in that sense ‘anypostatic’), and somehow is individuated in, or belongs to, the hypostasis of the divine Word (is in that sense ‘anypostatic’). Today the trend just identified is sometimes referred to as ‘Neo-Chalcedonianism’. The anathematizing canons of the Council of 533 were to form the high-water mark of Neo-Chalcedonianism in the Early Church.43

In the mid-sixth century, protagonists of the trend identified were seeking the condemnation as Nestorian of Theodore, Theodoret and Ibas of Edessa — grouping these targets under the name of the ‘Three Chapters’. Such condemnation was fiercely promoted by the Emperor, Justinian. Pope Vigilius initially aligned himself with widespread Western opposition to any condemnation. In the mid-540s Vigilius was brought by force from Rome to Constantinople on the Emperor’s orders; and for over eight years the aging and sick pontiff was put under extreme pressure to acquiesce in Justinian’s wishes — pressure including physical violence and threats of violence, incarceration, psychological coercion, and deprivation of his preferred advisers. In 548, he issued a statement expressing assent to the condemnation of the ‘Three Chapters’. Vigorous resistance to this capitulation ensued in the West. In 552, the Pope, reverting to his original approach, composed an anti-monophysite profession of faith. Then in May 553, a few days after the Council had opened in rebellion against himself, Vigilius published his first Constitutum, dissociating himself from the Council, and upholding the orthodoxy of the ‘Three Chapters’ — albeit also pronouncing five anathemas against Nestorian tendencies. The Council, having condemned Vigilius himself and ignored his first Constitutum, proceeded to formulate its fourteen anathematizing canons. The first of ten of these depict Christ in a markedly Alexandrian, Cyriline fashion — as in canons 1, 2 and 5 above. Canon 11 has a somewhat different focus. Canons 12, 13 and 14 are more directly against the ‘Three Chapters’. Justinian pressed Vigilius to accept the canons, and would not allow him to return to Rome unless he did so. After six months Vigilius, in February 554, produced his second Constitutum, a document which expressed some acceptance of the Council’s formulations, but which said nothing about the first ten canons. Amidst considerable hostility to the Council in the West, Vigilius died on his eventual journey back to Rome.

Was there any genuine papal consent to formulations of the Council? Some editorial words in the modern Denzinger, briefly describing the setting of the Council, serve to highlight the problem. Vigilius iamdiu vi Roma asportatus libertati suae studes per to tum tempus concilio interesse renuit; et ita only machinationibus imperatoris damnum cedens that he expressed confirmation of the Council.42 In the relevant volume of the major Histoire des Conciles Oecuméniques, F.-X. Murphy, C.S.S.R., and P. Sherwood, O.S.B., state that it is not out of place de mettre en question la valeur doctrinale du IIe Constitutum de Vigile, car il est evident que le pape n’était pas libre, mais sous la contrainte, quand il le compta, et aussi parce qu’il annula en matiere de foi, ses decisions jadis exprimées avec une conviction ferme.42

We may note that the varying and cumulative modes of imperial coercion against the Pope from 545 onwards were of a different order to any imperial pressures exerted in 325, 381 or 451. An assessment that Vigilius acted under duress in producing the second Constitutum cannot easily be avoided.43 It is not only in cases of ‘marriage’ that Catholic Christian sensitivities to absence of real consent are properly enlivened.44

Supposing that the Pope genuinely ratified anything, did its range include canons 1 to 10? As Murphy and Sherwood repeatedly stress, in his second Constitutum le pape ne mentionne pas non plus la doctrine théologique exprimée dans le dix premiers anathèmes du concile: il se préoccupe seulement d’accepter les vues de l’assemblée sur la condamnation des Trois Chapitres.45

These authors go on to observe that it is légitime de se demander si Vigile a réellement accepté la formulation doctrinale, étant donné que le concile n’était pas en communion avec le pape quand ces anathèmes furent décidés.46

The editors of the widely-used collection of Church documents entitled The Christian Faith, namely J. Neuner, S.J., and J. Dupuis, S.J., comment pertinently here:

In his second Constitutum of February 554, Pope Vigilius explicitly approved the Council’s condemnation of the ‘three chapters’, thus conferring post factum the value of a general Council to part of the work of Constantinople. This approval does not, however, seem to
extend to all the canons but only to the last three, directly concerned with the 'three chapters'. The Pope's approval of these canons implies the condemnation of the propositions attributed to them in the 'three chapters', without passing judgement on the authors and their actual writings. The significance of the second general Council of Constantinople consists in a reiterated condemnation of the Nestorian heresy (my italics).47

This estimation by Neuner and Dupuis of the limits to what Pope Vigilius approved (supposing he freely approved anything) carries considerable conviction.

The way the International Theological Commission expressed itself in its document Select Questions on Christology (1980) possesses some interest in the present context. Having commended regard to the Council of Chalcedon, the Commission's document says,

In addition, we must pay attention to the last christological councils, and especially to the Third Council of Constantinople in 681 A.D.48

The document does not explicitly refer at all to the 553 Council.

The purpose of the current section of this article has been to highlight some of the doubts which not implausibly arise about whether canons 1 to 10 passed by the assembled bishops in June 553, and specifically canons 1, 2, 5, express valid decisions of an ecumenical council — decisions to which Catholic Christians aptly adhere. Much fuller examination of these topics is needed.49 It is important, however, to grasp clearly that in terms of logical sequence, only if those canons are to be seen as expressing such valid decisions do they have any necessary, constitutive bearing at all on what Catholic Christians today should hold about Christ's identity.50 Only if that condition stands met can there be even a prima facie case that, on account of the assembly of 553, Catholic Christians should endorse the 'Subject Divine and Not Human' position.

4. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The above pages have contained comparatively little direct study of a series of broad issues which in principle are intrinsic to analysis of whether a Catholic Christian is bound by Chalcedon and/or by Constantinople III to hold — as the correct account — that the subject in Christ is divine and is not (as such) human. The issues include: What is it for a council to 'maintain' something? How far do claims as to a council maintained, or meant, entail assertions about the beliefs or intentions of assorted council fathers? In what sense (if any) is a distinction tenable between a

council's underlying judgements, and the linguistic formulations or conceptualizations, themselves relative to a particular historical and intellectual setting, wherein those judgements are expressed? Exactly what part do formulations ('propositions'), or again judgements, advanced by ecumenical councils play within divine revelation, and within whatever assent in faith Catholic Christians properly make? In what sense(s) do Catholic Christians — called as they are to personal response towards, and relationship with, God — have to accept any particular tenet? What is it for faith-articulations today to be in basic continuity with the utterances or decisions of a past council, and how does one tell whether they are or not? While these matters have not received extended, generalized discussion in the present article, the article has at points invoked approaches to them whose soundness could readily be elaborated. Some of the elements at stake, to do with divine action, Spirit, and the character of the Church, were touched on in the article's opening pages.

A thorough exposition of what we should take Chalcedon to have done, and of Chalcedon's bearing for today, can be well achieved only within presentation of a large-scale, positive standpoint. The large-scale outlook I myself uphold incorporates certain views on knowledge, language and reality which are highly germane to our present concerns. We should allow for absence of straightforward one-to-one correspondences between linguistic patterns and divine-human reality; and for the need to treat in an explicit fashion the notion 'the correct account of things'. Yet this should be within solid adherence to a form of (qualified) realism.51 In a systematic account of Christ's identity and role we fittingly employ three key, irreducible patterns of portrayal — as I have indicated elsewhere. One of these key modes of portrayal has some affinities with stance K sketched earlier. Another has some affinities with stance M. The third key pattern of portrayal is distinct from any of the stances mentioned above. It has to do with Christ's cross and resurrection, and the possibility of people sharing — in an ongoing, transcendent fashion — within Christ's death and risen life, and within his relationship with the divine Father.52 When the overall, positive outlook just referred to is amplified, its secure continuity with Chalcedon, on a proper understanding of that Council's Definition, can readily be discerned.53

The modest conclusion of the present article as regards Chalcedon comprises negation of the view that the Council maintained the one hypostasis or person or subject in Christ to be divine and not (as such) human. Chalcedon made no judgement of that character, requiring Catholic Christians today to hold, as the correct account of Jesus, the 'Subject Divine and Not Human' position. As for the
assembly of 553, we have noted that the theologian today may not simply take for granted the authoritative status of canons 1 to 10, and treat as the sole issue what relevance those canons then have to the attitude of Catholic Christians vs. vs. vs. the 'Subject Divine and Human' position. The logically prior issue is whether canons 1 to 10 express valid judgements of an ecumenical council at all. As we have observed, marked difficulties attend the idea that they do so.

NOTES
1 (G. Chapman, London, 1983), p. 182. There is no attempt in this article to provide full catalogues of which theologians have supported one or other of the ideas identified.
2 Some of the relevant theological principles are to be found in Vatican II, Lumen Gentium, art. 55.
4 E.g., on the page (p. 182) of O'Connell's book Interpretng Jesus from which the passage quoted earlier in my text comes. See also in that book pp. 16, 18, 180-1, 190.
5 For Cyril, the subject in Christ is (as such) divine, but has also by assimilation essential human properties; whereas in the case of each of the first ten of us the subject is human, but can because of Christ receive — here by a contrasting mode of obtaining — certain divine qualities. For elucidation of the heart of Cyril's standpoint, see the two articles by R. M. Saldias, 'Oneness and Difference in the Christology of Cyril of Alexandria', Studia Patristica XVIII, 1980, A.C.O. H. 1, 2, p. 129, lines 23ff. (see also M. A. Lardogna, 'The Christological Principles in Cyril of Alexandria', Studia Patristica XIX, Part 2, in Textus und Untersuchungen 116 (1971), pp. 255-66).
6 The point here on stance I, that there was never a moment in the life of the human subject which was not in the beginning united with the divine subject, distinguishes it from the Christological view that at a stage during the ongoing career of a human subject (Jesus, God) somehow 'adapted' that subject.
7 The question is: is there a similarity of his standpoint, including his use of the category of relation (curves) within the subject Christology be propounded, in chapter 5 of a Cambridge Ph.D. dissertation by R. M. Saldias entitled 'Logic and Christology in Cyril of Alexandria' (1994). Saldias discusses in that text the characters of Cyril's Christology and, the context and elements of schemas involved; the J.T.S.S. article cited in note 5 above also affords illumination also. The position taken by Theodore of Mopseustas several years earlier may be summarized: see the dogmatical fragments quoted in an appendix to H. D. Swett, ed., The Theology of St. Cyril of Alexandria (Oxford University Press, Cambridge, 1982), pp. 200-311. Saldias comments on those pages of Theodore in his Ph.D. dissertation at p. 213, note 122. We should keep in view too the observations of Tertullian much earlier still in Against Praxeas 27 — a characteristic stance of St Thomas Aquinas, M. D. Withering, with that phrase at note 246. In The Journal of Theological Studies 16 (1955), pp. 454-65.
8 It is interesting to consider what over the years has been the impact on popular perceptions of Christ made by the liturgical rection Sunday by Sunday of Nicene's single homoeousios, with no parallel prominence given in the liturgy of Chalcedon's double homoeousios.
10 Different concepts of 'oneess' (or 'union') which were discussed by thinkers at large in the fifth and fourth centuries, and the texture of Cyril's ideas about the oneness of Christ as against Nestorius's notions, receive elucidation by Saldias in his writings cited in notes 5 and 7 above.
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Christological climate had, of course, altered by the time of the Third Council of Constantinople in 680-81.

43 Moreover, it is not obvious that Vigilius was immune from duress in May 553, when he issued his first Constitution. Murphy and Sherwood, at ibid., p. 129, characterize Vigilius as content at that point to say certain things — things not uncongenial, at least as far as they went, to Neo-Chalcedonians (see the words quoted in note 46 below). But one must wonder if Vigilius, apart from, 'to what would it be relevant?' that Vigilius genuinely was to content? Murphy and Sherwood assert at p. 130, 'le concile en bloc a été accepté Vigilius. Given, however, what these two authors say of the first Constitution of Vigilius and the second Constitution of 553, one must ask whether Vigilius could have been understood. Of course, claims about what Chalcedon meant are said in the way of identifying the one hypostasis should be gauged taking account of all the sets of factors, (i) to (vii), set out in my text.
44 As regards perceptions of Chalcedon by ancient theologians, we may notice a point concerning the people ('Monophysites') who, believing themselves to be upholders of authentic Cyrillic, radically opposed the Council of 451 as allowing in Nestorian ideas. Such people were indeed severely blinkered. But on my assessment of Chalcedon, there is no need to understand these people's reading of that Council to be an outright, total inversion of what actually happened.
46 ibid., p. 218, and compare, p. 248.
47 The present article does not attempt to enlarge on this vital further matter. A few hints — no more — as to how I would, in fact, enlarge on it are contained in the concluding section of the article, section vi.
48 Amongst the vast array of pertinent scholarly discourse it may be noted here pp. 6-12 of A. Grillo's recent book Christ in Christian Tradition, Volume II, Part One (New York, Oxford, 1987) pages which are headed, 'The question of the binding character of Chalcedon, or of the reception of Chalcedon, and of the reception of formulas of helenism.'
49 W. Kasper, in Interpreting Jesus, p. 182. See also pp. 118 and 133.
50 Whatever Happened to the Human Mind?, p. 322.
51 This translation is basically taken from J. Neuner and J. Dupuis, eds., The Christian Faith, Revised Edition (Collins, London, 1983), pp. 158-50. A few of the phrases supplied are my amendments to the Neuner and Dupuis renderings e.g., in canon 1, 'having a single essence'; in canon 5, 'in a way that pertains to hypostasis'; and throughout, using pseudoprophylaxis rather than 'orthodoxy'. The Greek text is in A.C.O. IV. 1, pp. 240 f., lines 3ff.
52 One approach which may be examined is that of W. Kasper, in Jesus the Christ. Kasper's observations on p. 239 — in connection with Constantinople II — about the Logos, the eternal Son of God, and the man Jesus, must be borne in mind in the light of what he says elsewhere in the book, including at pp. 86, 175, 233, 248, 251 and 256-68.
53 For Vatican II, the principle is discernible in Lumen Gentium, arts 22 and 25. Concerning the current Code of Canon Law, see canons 336, 337, 338, and especially canons 337 and 338.
54 Features of the period at base are summarized in, for example, R. Y. Sellers, The Councils of Chalcedon, pp. 234-330. See also Grillo, Christ in Christian Tradition, Volume II, Part One. An exposition of how Leonidas of Byzantium was himself faithful to Chalcedon as such, rather than (as is sometimes supposed) a pioneer of Neo-Chalcedonism, is found in D. Daley, 'The Origin of Leonidas of Byzantium', The Journal of Theological Studies 27 (1976), pp. 335-69.
55 The matter is discussed in the present survey no attention received by G. O'Collins or E. Macaulay, during their remarks about Constantinople II illustrated on pp. 122 of my text. On a different note, and speaking broadly, let me acknowledge appreciatively the great profit derivable from study of the Christological writings and sermons of the fifth century. None of this article's utterances on the Council of 553 are to be understood as entertaining, as even a remote possibility, dissociation from anything to which the Church stands irreducibly committed.
56 The reactions of the present survey do not receive any attention given by G. O'Collins or E. Macaulay, during their remarks about Constantinople II illustrated on pp. 122 of my text. On a different note, and speaking broadly, let me acknowledge appreciatively the great profit derivable from study of the Christological writings and sermons of the fifth century. None of this article's utterances on the Council of 553 are to be understood as entertaining, as even a remote possibility, dissociation from anything to which the Church stands irreducibly committed.
57 See my article 'How is Christ's life relevant to other people's salvation?', The Heythrop Journal 28 (1987), at p. 145.
58 These three exemplary modes of portrayal are summarized in my article 'What is changed in virtue of Christ?', King's Theological Review 10 (1987), at p. 5; and the latter two modes receive fuller consideration in my essay on Christ's life in The Heythrop Journal 28 (1987), pp. 164-84.
59 Moreover, the relation of this overall outlook to what was said in the canons of the 553 Council of Constantinople can be pursued.
60