
**Eutychianism and the Chalcedonian Formula:
Implications for Christological Orthodoxy in the Nigerian Evangelical Church**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the historical and contemporary implications of Eutychianism and the Chalcedonian Formula for Christological orthodoxy, particularly within the Nigerian Evangelical Church. The research identified a critical need for enhanced Christological understanding in the contemporary Nigerian Evangelical Church, where prevalent indigenous beliefs and charismatic expressions inadvertently lead to imbalances, notably an overemphasis on Christ's divinity at the expense of his full humanity, echoing the fifth-century Eutychian heresy. Employing a non-empirical, conceptual, and historical theological analysis, the study examined Eutychianism's historical context and theological assertions, assessed the significance of the Chalcedonian Formula, and critically analysed the perspectives of Paul Tillich, Harold O.J. Brown, and J.N.D. Kelly. The primary argument is that safeguarding doctrinal integrity necessitates a robust reaffirmation of Christ's dual nature, which effectively counters the resurgence of historical Christological heresies. Key findings confirmed Eutychianism's contention that Christ's human nature was absorbed by his divine nature, resulting in a single, fused nature, which the Council of Chalcedon decisively rejected in AD 451. The study concluded that Eutychianism's denial of Christ's full humanity undermines the Incarnation and salvific efficacy. For the Nigerian Evangelical Church, there is a vital need to maintain the Chalcedonian balance, affirming Christ as truly God and truly human without confusion, without change, without division, without separation—to ensure Christ's gospel holistically addresses human day-to-day needs and fosters doctrinal purity amidst theological syncretism. This research contributes to knowledge by providing a vital theological framework for doctrinal purity in a context grappling with theological syncretism.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Theological discussions on the essence of Christ, particularly the concept of the hypostatic union, which affirms Christ's simultaneous full humanity and full divinity, remain a central and often divisive topic in Christian history.¹ This historical, theological challenge continues to resonate profoundly within the contemporary Nigerian Evangelical Church,² Where there is a critical need for enhanced Christological awareness.³ This necessity arises from prevalent indigenous beliefs and charismatic expressions that can unknowingly lead to Christological imbalances, specifically an overemphasis on Christ's divinity at the expense of his full humanity.⁴ Such inclinations frequently appear through syncretistic practices that compromise orthodox Christological understanding within this context.⁵ While Christ's divine nature is not entirely inappropriate, an imbalance that subtly

elevates it above His human nature can inadvertently imply sinfulness in Christ's humanity (Cf. 2 Cor. 5:21).

This contemporary challenge in Nigeria directly echoes the fifth-century movement of Eutychianism, which contended that Christ's human nature was absorbed by his divine nature, resulting in a singular, fused nature. Historically, Eutychianism was sometimes interpreted as the divine absorbing the human, or vice versa (cf. Luke 1:35). Nevertheless, from any perspective, it remains a misrepresentation of the incarnate Christ.⁶ This theological position was decisively rejected at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE.⁷ The persistent influence of Eutychianism underscores the crucial need for ongoing theological vigilance. Therefore, this study is paramount for safeguarding doctrinal integrity by reinforcing a robust understanding of Christ's dual nature,

¹ See Shanūdah Māhir Ishāq, *Christology and the Council of Chalcedon* (Denver, Colorado: Outskirts Press, 2013).

² Adopting Komolafe's view, Evangelical Theology in Nigeria should be seen here as offering an "interpretive framework for a contextual yet biblical way of doing Christian theology" and a "missiological and theological compass" for understanding non-Western and global Christianity. See Sunday Jide Komolafe, *The Transformation of African Christianity: Development and Change in the Nigerian Church* (Carlisle: Langham Monographs, 2013).

³ See Hans-Georg Wüch, "Learning from African Theologians and Their Hermeneutics: Some Reflections from a German Evangelical Theologian," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 36, no. 1 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v36i1.1394>.

⁴ John F. Kilner, "The Image of God, the Need for God, and Bioethics," *Christian Bioethics: Non-Ecumenical Studies in Medical Morality* 23, no. 3 (December 2017): 261–82, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cb/cbx010>.

⁵ Dapo F. Asaju, "Contending for the Faith: Contemporary Heresies in Nigeria," <https://Anglicandioceseofogbaru.Com/Contending-for-the-Faith-Contemporary-Heresies-in-Nigeria/>, February 3, 2022, <https://anglicandioceseofogbaru.com/contending-for-the-faith-contemporary-heresies-in-nigeria/>. See also Jake Otonko, "Beyond the Rhetoric of the 'next Christendom'? An Examination of the Integrity of the Christian Faith in Nigeria," *Scriptura* 117, no. 1 (2018): 1–12. The mention of *syncretistic practices* here is to portray that even as sound biblical interpretation is paramount for ministers within the Nigerian Evangelical Church, errors can inadvertently occur when there is a

tendency to consider Christ's divine nature as superior to his human nature. This study identifies such a Christological imbalance as a form of theological syncretism, manifesting not as two independent natures, but rather as an absorption or diminishment of Christ's human nature into his divine nature, resulting in a functionally single or fused understanding of Christ's person.

⁶ The paper mentions the term *incarnate Christ*. In this paper, the term should be understood as Reuben L. Turbi argues, that the incarnate Christ as Jesus Christ took human flesh to fulfil God's promise about the coming Messiah for human redemption. This act revealed his ontological being as both divine and human, marking the culmination of God's covenantal promises. Therefore, whenever this term is mentioned in this paper, the reader should consider the above as the definition of the phrase. See Reuben Turbi Luka, *Jesus Christ as Ancestor: A Theological Study of Major African Ancestor Christologies in Conversation with the Patristic Christologies of Tertullian and Athanasius*, with Yusufu Turaki (Carlisle: Langham Monographs, 2019). P.12.

⁷ See for instance Ter Ern Loke, Andrew. "On how Chalcedonian Christology can be affirmed without the errors of Eutychianism and Nestorianism: A reply to Joshua Farris" *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 63, no. 1 (2021): 110-121. <https://doi.org/10.1515/nzsth-2021-0006>; See also Ter Ern Loke, Andrew. "On the Divine Preconscious Model of the Incarnation and concrete-nature Christology: A reply to James Arcadi," *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 59, no. 1 (2017): 26-33. <https://doi.org/10.1515/nzsth-2017-0002>.

thereby actively preventing the resurgence of historical heresies in modern theological contexts. By engaging with these foundational debates, this paper aims to provide a vital theological framework to nurture a deeper connection between believers and the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ, especially in regions like Nigeria, where theological syncretism poses significant challenges to doctrinal purity.

To address the critical concerns identified regarding Christological awareness and theological syncretism within the contemporary Nigerian Evangelical Church, this study aims to examine the historical context and theological assertions of Eutychianism. Furthermore, it aims to evaluate the significance of the Chalcedonian Formula as a vital safeguard for Christological orthodoxy (right belief). The research also critically analyses the perspectives of prominent theologians, namely Paul Tillich, Harold O. J. Brown, and J.N.D. Kelly, concerning these doctrines.⁸ Ultimately, the study aims to examine the ongoing implications of Eutychianism and the Chalcedonian Formula for contemporary Christian theology, with a particular focus on the Nigerian Evangelical Church. This comprehensive approach is designed to provide a vital theological framework for doctrinal purity in a context grappling with theological syncretism.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This study utilised a non-empirical research approach, specifically a conceptual and historical theological analysis design. The theoretical framework was firmly rooted in systematic and historical theology, providing conceptual tools for understanding the

development and relevance of Christian doctrine.⁹ This framework was crucial for understanding complex theological concepts, such as the hypostatic union, as defined by the Council of Chalcedon. The method of inquiry involved five key steps. It began with Historical-Critical Interpretation, critically examining primary and secondary sources on Eutychianism and the Council of Chalcedon to understand their historical and intellectual contexts. This focused on how Eutychianism posited the absorption of human by divine nature, and Chalcedon's response to safeguard Christ's distinct full humanity and divinity. Secondly, Conceptual Analysis meticulously clarified terms like 'hypostatic union,' 'two natures without confusion, change, division, or separation,' and 'Incarnation,' aligning with Oliver D. Crisp's approach to Christology.¹⁰ The nature and scope of sources encompassed existing theological literature, historical documents, and the perspectives of Paul Tillich, Harold O.J. Brown, and J.N.D. Kelly. The interpretive strategy was guided by an Evangelical theological lens, particularly to address issues within the Nigerian Evangelical Church, informed by Harold O. J. Brown's views on orthodoxy. This methodology is justified by its suitability for a theological inquiry that relies on a rigorous examination of existing literature, enabling a critical analysis of Christ's nature and the Chalcedonian Formula's relevance to contemporary theological discourse.

⁸ Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought*, edited by Carl E. Braaten, Harper & Row (New York, 1977), Lecture 21 ("The Later Eastern Churches"), p. 289. On that page, Tillich writes that the post-Chalcedonian schisms so fatally weakened imperial unity in the East "that they cleared the way for the great Islamic advance of the seventh century."

⁹ See Peter Lee Ochieng Oduor, "Christological Contextualization as a Parameter to Strengthen Theology Formulation and Enhance Christian Evangelization in Africa," *East African Journal of Traditions, Culture and Religion* 3, no. 2 (September 2021): 58–78,

<https://doi.org/10.37284/eajtr.3.2.411>. The chosen research methodology is validated by its successful application in prior academic research analyzing similar theological concepts. See Turbi Luka, *Jesus Christ as Ancestor*. P. 30.

¹⁰ In pages xiii of the preface in Oliver D. Crisp's book titled "Divinity and Humanity," he defended one traditional picture of the person of Christ without offering a substitute for the Chalcedonian view. Oliver D. Crisp, *Divinity and Humanity: The Incarnation Reconsidered*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York. 2007. pp. xiii.

3.0 UNDERSTANDING EUTYCHIANISM

3.1 Origins and Development of Eutychian Thought

Eutychianism is a theological doctrine that emerged in the early Christian church, particularly in the 5th century. It was named after Eutyches, a monk from Constantinople who believed in the unity of Christ's nature after the Incarnation. This doctrine posited that Christ's divine nature fully absorbed his human nature, resulting in a single nature that was both divine and human.¹¹ The Council of Chalcedon considered Eutychianism heretical in 451 AD, which affirmed the dual nature of Christ as both fully divine and fully human. According to the New Advent Catholic Encyclopaedia,

The error took its rise in a reaction against Nestorianism, which taught that in Christ there is a human hypostasis or person as well as a Divine one. This was interpreted to imply a want of reality in the union of the Word with the assumed Humanity, and even to result in two Christs, two Sons. However, this was far from Nestorius's intention in giving his incorrect explanation of the union.¹²

Despite its condemnation, Eutychian thought continued to influence theological debates in the Eastern Christian tradition and indirectly impacts contemporary theological discourse, necessitating vigilance against similar deviations in emerging theologies, including those within the Nigerian Evangelical Church.¹³

Over time, the development of Eutychianism led to further discussions on the nature of Christ and his relationship to humanity.

3.2 Critical Analysis of Eutychianism's Impact on Christian Thought

Eutychianism, a theological doctrine that emerged in the early centuries of Christianity, has had a significant impact on Christian thought and understanding of the nature of Christ. The controversy surrounding Eutychianism centred on the nature of Christ's humanity and divinity, with Eutyches, a monk from Constantinople, asserting that Christ's divine nature completely absorbed his human nature, resulting in a single, unified nature. The Council of Chalcedon condemned this view as heretical in 451 AD, affirming the belief in Christ's two distinct natures —fully human and fully divine —united in one person.¹⁴ Despite its condemnation, Eutychianism continued to influence Christian thought, sparking debates and discussions on the nature of Christ and the implications for salvation and the relationship between God and humanity. Munyao Martin, in his chapter on Christology in Africa, analysed that, "For most of Jesus' life, his ministry on the earth was marked with a sense of obscurity. The Gospels tell a story that after Jesus calmed the storm in the presence of his disciples, they asked, 'Who is this man? That even the winds and waves obey him!' (Matt 8:27)."¹⁵ Debates on the essence and person of Christ have created

¹¹ Bradley K. Storin, "Leo of Rome, Tome to Flavian of Constantinople," in *The Cambridge Edition of Early Christian Writings: Volume 4: Christ: Chalcedon and Beyond*, ed. Mark DelCogliano, The Cambridge Edition of Early Christian Writings (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 4:36–48, Cambridge Core, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009057103.003>.

¹² John Chapman, "Eutychianism," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 5 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05633a.htm>.

¹³ Using Nigerian grassroots Christianity as an example, field research indicates that the relationship is equivalent of a working Christology (Jesus is, foremost, healer/provider/problem-solver) that tends to supersede ontological confession (true God and true man). See Victor I. Ezigbo, *Contextualizing the Christ-Event...* In his PhD thesis (University of Edinburgh, 2008), On experience-driven portraits of the Jesus and how they

can marginalize Chalcedonian stay, interviews with Nigerians and congregational writings are used to examine how experience-driven portraits of the Jesus may sideline Chalcedonian balance.

¹⁴ Mitch Bedzyk, "The Chalcedonian Creed," Website, Emmanuel Church Community, March 26, 2021, <https://eccelmira.org/articles/the-chalcedonian-creed/>.

¹⁵ Martin Munyao, "Christology in Africa," in *The Routledge Handbook of African Theology*, 1st Edition, Routledge Handbooks in Theology, ed. Elias Kifon Bongmba, Chapter 27 (London and New York: Routledge/Taylor Francis Group, 2020), 412. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781315107561-32/christology-africa-martin-munyao?context=ubx>. It is also important to remember that the Western Church did not think about the Eastern Church, which included Africa, when it came up with solutions to these doctrinal problems. As a result, early in the church's theological formulation, Christological

the traditional theological problems of his period, which are challenged by this problem not only today but from Jesus' time as well.¹⁶ Concepts like essence, nature, substance, and person played a significant role in answering the question of 'who is this man?' The early church's definition of traditional Christology differs from Gregory's, which is perceived as complex, presenting challenges for academics seeking definitive categorisation due to his unusual positions relative to contemporary theological factions.¹⁷

His indecisive predispositions toward unity and division increase the difficulty of his Christological worldview. Gregory's wording emphasizes the union of Christ's divine and human natures, but it also makes passing references to ideas held to be heretical by the Church, such as Eutychianism and Nestorianism.¹⁸ This blending of contradictory perspectives in his writings leaves interpreters struggling to understand the coherence and belief of his Christology. Understanding Gregory's Christology necessitates a careful consideration of the theological context of his time. Within the intense theological debates, Gregory's seemingly paradoxical approach can be seen as a creative effort to engage with

doctrinal problems while upholding the Church's tradition, providing a model for contextual theology relevant to addressing contemporary issues in the Nigerian Evangelical Church.

For this research, Daley's analysis of Gregory of Nyssa's Christology here underscores the challenging task of interpreting early Christian theology.¹⁹ While Gregory's portrayal of Christ may challenge easy classification and raise concerns about coherence, it prompts a deeper exploration of the diverse theological reflections in the early Christian era. While a detailed analysis of Gregory's Christology is beyond the immediate scope of this study, his complex approach serves as an important reminder of the diverse and often challenging theological reflections within the early Christian era. His thought exemplifies the intricate pursuit of understanding Christ's nature, a quest from which Eutychianism emerged as a significant deviation. The legacy of Eutychianism is the ongoing theological discussions and controversies within the Christian tradition, highlighting the enduring impact of this ancient doctrine on the development of Christian theology. The critical analysis of Eutychianism's flawed Christology

discourses did not originate in Africa, despite the continent's difficulties.

¹⁶ The theological issues concerning the nature and the person of Christ have indeed been the basis of theological problem in the history of the Church since the early ages to today. Leonard Ndzi points out instances where early Christological controversies such as Arianism and Nestorianism gave rise to councils such as Nicaea and Chalcedon and the inclusion of Christ as having two natures, a system that remains the focus of theology in modern times that advances or opposes the system. Mark Yenson uses a modern Christology of Jacques Dupuis with its separation of the Word as such and the Word incarnate as an analogy to historical Nestorian-related anxieties about the one person of Christ. Reinforcing this continuity, Jordan Daniel Wood demonstrates how modern Christology tries to struggle with these questions of identity and difference in the light of which historical interpretations such as Neo-Chalcedonianism are abducted to approach long-lasting complications. Therefore, what makes Christ a unique being is one of the main evolving tasks. See Leonard Ndzi, "A Historical and Theological Examination of Christ's Nature and Work," *Religious Studies* 5, no. 1 (2025); Mark Yenson, "Jacques Dupuis and Chalcedon,"

Theological Studies 80, no. 2 (June 2019): 271–92, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040563919836241>; Jordan Daniel Wood, "Neo-Chalcedonian Christology: Its Historical Return & Systematic Promise," *Word in the Flesh*, February 15, 2025, <https://jordandanielwood.substack.com/p/neo-chalcedonian-christology>.

¹⁷ See thoughts on Gregory from Sarah Coakley, "Why Christology 'Matters' for Ethics: Constructing a Typology of Options," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 44, no. 2 (2024): 241–60, <https://doi.org/10.5840/jsce2024815112>.

¹⁸ See for instance Richard Cross and Sarah Coakley, eds., *Early Scholastic Christology 1050-1250: Changing Paradigms in Historical and Systematic Theology*, 1st ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198936015.001.0001>.

¹⁹ Brian Daley, "Divine Transcendence and Human Transformation: Gregory of Nyssa's Anti-Apollinarian Christology," *Modern Theology* 18, no. 4 (October 2002): 497–506. See also Brian Daley, "'Heavenly Man' and 'Eternal Christ': Apollinarius and Gregory of Nyssa on the Personal Identity of the Savior," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 469–88.

naturally leads to an examination of the Council of Chalcedon, which was convened to definitively address such theological controversies and establish an orthodox understanding of Christ's dual nature. The council's profound impact on Christian theology thus merits a thorough exploration.

4.0 THE CHALCEDONIAN FORMULA AGAINST THE FUSION OF HUMAN AND DIVINE NATURES

4.1 Historical Context of the Council of Chalcedon

The Council of Chalcedon, held in 451 AD, was a significant event in the history of Christianity that addressed the theological disputes surrounding the nature of Christ. The council was organised by Emperor Marcian and attended by over 500 bishops, making it one of the largest gatherings of church leaders in history.²⁰ The primary issue debated at Chalcedon was the relationship between the divine and human natures of Christ, with differing views held by various factions within the church. The council ultimately affirmed the doctrine of the two natures of Christ, stating that he was both fully divine and fully human, without mixture, confusion, or separation. Donald G. Bloesch says that, "Based on its fidelity to the scriptural witness, the church has declared that Jesus Christ is true God and true Man in One Person. As the Creed of Chalcedon (451) so powerfully enunciates, he is consubstantial with the Father according to his divinity and consubstantial with us men (except for sin) according to his humanity."²¹ This decision had far-reaching implications for the development of Christian theology and the organization of the church, as it established a clear framework for understanding the nature of Christ that would shape the beliefs of future generations of Christians. The Council of Chalcedon also had political ramifications, as it solidified the authority of the Roman Emperor in church matters and further divided the

Eastern and Western branches of Christianity. Understanding these historical divisions is crucial for navigating ecumenical relationships today, including those involving Nigerian Evangelical denominations.

4.2 Examination of the Chalcedonian Creed

The Chalcedonian Creed, also known as the Definition of Chalcedon, is a pivotal document in the history of Christianity, formulated in 451 AD at the Council of Chalcedon. The creed responds to theological controversies on the nature of Christ, seeking to clarify the relationship between his divine and human natures. Donald G. Bloesch, in examining the Chalcedonian Creed, noted its precise affirmations:

Against the Monophysites, the Chalcedonian creed affirmed two natures "without confusion and change." The two natures coexist in Jesus Christ; they do not merge into one another. Against the Nestorians, Chalcedon stated that the two natures exist "without division and separation." While its latter-day critics have accused Chalcedon of intellectualizing the faith, it succeeded in safeguarding the fundamental mystery and paradox at the heart of the faith.²²

Donald's assertion regarding the Chalcedonian creed's stance against Monophysitism and Nestorianism, with a focus on Eutychianism, prompts critical engagement. The creed's affirmation of two natures in Jesus Christ "without confusion and change" indeed stands as a wall against Eutychianism, which posited a blending or absorption of Christ's divine and human natures into a singular hybrid nature. By this articulated distinction, Chalcedon sought to maintain the integrity and distinctiveness of both Christ's divine and human aspects, ensuring that neither is compromised nor diminished. However, one might argue that while Chalcedon effectively countered Eutychianism, its formulation also encountered

²⁰ Dennis Ngien, "Chalcedonian Christology and beyond: Luther's Understanding of the Communicatio Idiomatum," *Heythrop Journal* 45, no. 1 (January 2004): 54–68, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2265.2004.00242.x>.

²¹ Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of evangelical Theology: God, Authority & Salvation (Volume 1)*, Harper & Row, Publishers, San Francisco, 1978. 127.

²² Donald G. Bloesch, 1978. 128.

challenges in precisely defining the nature of the union between the divine and human in Christ. This ongoing challenge underscores the need for careful theological education within the Nigerian Evangelical Church to prevent misinterpretations. The tension persists: how can two distinct natures coexist in one person without either being overwhelmed or diminished?²³ This research paper suggests that, to some extent, Eutychianism was merely one manifestation of the struggle to reconcile this mystery, even though its objective was not to resolve it.

While Chalcedon's emphasis on the two natures of Christ, without division and separation, served to refute Nestorianism, which proposed a separation or duality between Christ's divine and human aspects, bordering on a form of dual personality, it also served to affirm the unity of Christ. By affirming the unity of Christ's personhood without collapsing the distinction between his divine and human natures, Chalcedon sought to strike a middle path that honored the challenge of Christological mystery beyond the limits of human wisdom. However, despite its intentions to safeguard the faith's paradoxical nature, Chalcedon's formulation faced criticism for potentially reducing the mystery of the Incarnation to a rationalistic schema. Critics argue that by attempting to define the indefinable, Chalcedon risked diminishing the profound and ineffable nature of Christ's

identity, reducing it to a matter of theological precision rather than an awe-inspiring mystery.²⁴ Thus, while Chalcedon addressed immediate theological controversies, its legacy invites ongoing reflection on the delicate balance between doctrinal clarity and the immeasurable depths of divine mystery. The singular question is that, does the creed explain everything the church needs to know about the incarnation. Therefore, the creed itself is non-exhaustive about the divine incarnation. The Chalcedonian Creed has been widely accepted by most branches of Christianity, including the Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant traditions. It remains a foundational statement of faith for many believers. The examination of the Chalcedonian Creed reveals its enduring significance in shaping Christian theology and understanding of the person of Jesus Christ. Building upon the foundational framework established by the Chalcedonian Creed, it is imperative to examine how prominent theologians, such as Paul Tillich, Harold O. J. Brown, and J.N.D., Kelly have engaged with and interpreted these crucial Christological doctrines. Their perspectives offer valuable insights into the ongoing theological challenges of maintaining the Chalcedonian balance in the face of the enduring influence of Eutychian thought.

²³ The idea of this sentence is from Paul T. Nimmo, "Karl Barth and the Concursus Dei – A Chalcedonianism Too Far?," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9, no. 1 (January 2007): 58–72, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2400.2006.00229.x>.

²⁴ See some of these critics as presented by J. Todd Billings, "Incarnational Ministry and Christology: A Re-Appropriation of the Way of Lowliness," *Missiology* 32, no. 2 (April 2004): 187–201. Mihretu P. Guta in his quest to examine Eutyches's perspective also underscores that, "We can investigate this problem in at least three ways. The first way concerns the two bearers view. On this theory, the two natures of Christ can be said to have two distinct bearers. That is, one bearer for the human nature and another bearer for the divine nature. The second way concerns the one bearer view. On this theory, the two natures of Christ can be said to have a single bearer. The third way concerns the hybrid of the two bearers and the one bearer views. On the hybrid

theory, there is a sense in which the two natures of Christ can be said to require two bearers and there is also another sense in which the two natures of Christ can be said to require one bearer. But the hybrid view does not make headlines in the literature." For Guta this view underestimates the unique identity of Christ. Eutyches's theory may have sounded profound for the people of his time but is good to read in between the lines. As soon as the church begins measuring the logical nature of the incarnation the more blur it continues to be. Because the transcendence of God is beyond our reach, not because God Love has limits but because we are not fully prepared to face/understand the full glory of the lamb. See Mihretu P. Guta, "The Two Natures of the Incarnate Christ and the Bearer Question," *TheoLogica: An International Journal for Philosophy of Religion and Philosophical Theology* 3, no. 1 (March 2019): 113–43, <https://doi.org/10.14428/thl.v2i3.17663>.

4.3 Comparative Analysis of Paul Tillich, Harold O. J. Brown, and J.N.D. Kelly's Perspectives

In the study of Christian theology, the nature of Christ has been a central topic of discussion and debate throughout the history of the Christian church. One particular aspect of this discussion is Eutychianism, which this paper has been engaging with so far. In this section of the essay, the writer conducted a comparative analysis of the perspectives of three prominent theologians – Paul Tillich,^{25,26} Harold O. J. Brown,²⁷ and J.N.D. Kelly²⁸ – on Eutychianism's doctrine of the nature of Christ.

Firstly, Paul Tillich, a renowned existential theologian, rejected the dualistic approach to understanding the nature of Christ that was prevalent in traditional Christian theology.²⁹ Tillich believes that Christ's nature cannot be reduced to a mere combination of divine and human elements, but rather, it is a unique and unrepeatable unity. To complement Paul Tillich's position, Stephen G. Weaver asserted that, "If we might then be allowed to appeal to the 'two-natures' Christology in a less abstract way and more in terms of the symbolic language of metaphor and analogy, then we might be able to provide both a social interpretation of the two natures in Jesus the Christ as well as a psychological interpretation of the two natures."³⁰ In this context, Tillich critiques this heretical doctrine for its tendency to emphasise the divine nature of Christ at the expense of his humanity, resulting in a distorted understanding of the Incarnation and its practical implications in the life of Christ.

For Tillich, the Council of Chalcedon's decision, which condemned radical

Monophysitic positions like Eutychianism, profoundly disappointed the East and created a division that left Eastern Christianity, particularly the Monophysitic churches, vulnerable to the Islamic puritan reaction. His central thesis asserts that the success of Islamic attacks against Eastern Christianity was due to its failure to integrate elements of personality and history and its descent deeper and deeper into popular superstition, which he implicitly links to the Alexandrian desire for nothing less than God on earth, without human relativity or a magically working God.³¹ A key strength of this argument lies in its historical contextualization, linking internal theological divisions (like those exacerbated by Chalcedon) to external geopolitical vulnerability, aligning with the historical account of the East being 'swallowed up by the reaction of Islam'. However, a significant weakness is the ambiguity of some aspects of personality and history, as the provided sources do not elaborate on what these crucial terms mean or how their absence directly contributed to the observed vulnerability, leaving a central part of his thesis undefined.³²

Secondly, Harold O. J. Brown, a conservative evangelical theologian, adopted a more orthodox approach to the doctrine of Christ's nature. Brown emphasized the importance of maintaining the distinction between the divine and human natures of Christ, while also affirming their inseparable unity in the person of Jesus. He noted that,

Even in the twentieth century, its classical formulation, "two natures, one person," is the touchstone of Christological orthodoxy. The Council of Chalcedon was intended as an exercise in unity, but in

²⁵ Stenger, Mary Ann. "Tillich: A Guide for the Perplexed." *Religious Studies Review* 35, no. 4 (December 31, 2009): 249–50. <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=d2fa5cd8-9b1f-3999-a23b-bd9a1946821b>.

²⁶ Braeten Carl E., *Paul Tillich: A History of Christian Thought. From Its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1968).. 86-88.

²⁷ Brown, Harold O.J. *Heresies in the Image of Christ in the Mirror of Heresy and Orthodoxy from the Apostles to the Present*. Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1984. 184.

²⁸ Kelly, J. N. *History of Christian Doctrine* Revised Edition. Harper & Row Publishers, New York, 1978.

²⁹ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957). 148.

³⁰ Stephen G. Weaver, "'Three Persons Yet But One': The Trinitarian Theology of Hercules Collins," *Puritan Reformed Journal* 9, no. 2 (July 2017): 211–25.

³¹ Carl E., *Paul Tillich: A History of Christian Thought. From Its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism*. 372.

³² See Malcolm B. Yarnell III, "Christology in Chalcedon: Creed and Contextualization," *Southeastern Theological Review* 11, no. 2 (2020): 5–27.

fact, it solved only theoretical theological problems, not practical ecclesiastical ones. Specifically, it did not resolve the problem of the growing alienation of Egyptian Christians from the orthodoxy of Constantinople, where the Emperor and his government resided. The goal of the council was to reestablish harmony between the quarreling Eastern patriarchates and bring Alexandria and Antioch into harmony with Rome, theologically less sophisticated but more reliably orthodox.³³

As O.J. Brown explores the difficulties of Christological orthodoxy, it becomes clear that his focus extends beyond academic comprehension to practical consequences in the ecclesiastical sphere. With a critical eye, he examines the historical issues surrounding the Council of Chalcedon, acknowledging its desire to build unity among the Eastern patriarchates while addressing the growing separation of Egyptian Christians. Brown's observations highlight the contrast between theological accuracy and realistic ecclesiastical issues, emphasizing the difficulty of harmonizing doctrinal complexities with the practical realities of church government and a united society. In Brown's arguments in pages 179-184 of his book, Eutychianism is a 'radically Monophysitic position' where Christ's humanity is 'swallowed up into the divinity' after the incarnation, a view condemned by the Council of Chalcedon (AD451). Brown argues Chalcedon's strength lies in establishing an 'imperishable standard for orthodoxy' by reaffirming Christ's full humanity and the formula of 'two natures, one person,' thereby setting 'limits' against theological speculation and eliminating the 'demigod' concept.³⁴

However, a weakness in Chalcedon, as presented by Brown, is its failure to solve 'practical ecclesiastical problems,' as it 'narrowed the definition of orthodoxy' and contributed to the 'growing alienation of Egyptian Christians' and their 'easy submission' to Islam. Brown critically warns that modern 'conservative Christians—including evangelicals and fundamentalists' may 'drift into a Eutychian or monophysite view, seeing in Christ only his deity' and failing to acknowledge his full humanity.

Thirdly, J.N.D. Kelly, a respected historian of early Christianity, provided a scholarly perspective on the development of Christological doctrines in the early church.³⁵ Kelly's analysis of Eutychianism focuses on its historical context and the theological controversies that surrounded it, offering a valuable framework for understanding the development of doctrine and addressing contemporary theological challenges in diverse contexts such as the Nigerian Evangelical Church. Kelly's analysis of Eutychianism highlights the historical importance of precision in Christology. This ongoing need for clarity, and for practical engagement with Christ's full humanity, is echoed by contemporary theologians like Perez Alejandro, who, in a constructive reflection on evangelical theology, emphasizes the importance of understanding Christ's embodied existence, asking: "Now, it seems impossible to have forgotten a central fact, and more precisely, a biblical datum: the location of Christ's body in heaven. Why have scholars neglected this point? What is more, in a Christian doctrine where the body plays a central role, why have we not paid attention to Christ's body in heaven? I think that here we have a biblical fact which we need to revisit."³⁶

³³ Brown, Harold O.J. 1984. 181.

³⁴ Brown, Harold O.J. 1984. 184. According to Harold, the Council of Chalcedon aimed to promote unity, but solely addressed theoretical theological issues rather than practical ecclesiastical concerns. It did not address the rising estrangement of Egyptian Christians from the orthodoxy of Constantinople, where the Emperor and his government were based. The council aimed to restore harmony between Eastern patriarchates and align Alexandria and Antioch with Rome's theology that is more orthodox. See for instance Metong Eustace

Amakiri, "Lessons on the Council of Chalcedon (451) For a Better Understanding of Authentic Christianity in Africa," *Management and Humanities Innovations Journal* 9, no. 2 (2025): 50–56.

³⁵ J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th ed. (London, UK: A & C Black, 1985).

³⁶ Perez Alejandro, "An Embodied Existence in Heaven and the Non-Cartesian Substance Dualism," *TheoLogica: An International Journal for Philosophy of Religion and Philosophical Theology* 5, no. 2 (April 2021): 5–19.

This perspective, though distinct from Kelly's historical focus, highlights the continued call for a Christology that fully embraces both the divine and human realities of Christ, moving beyond mere theoretical assent to practical implications for faith.

Kelly, in pages 330-334, describes Eutyches as an 'aged and muddle-headed archimandrite' who held a 'radically Monophysitic position', arguing for 'one nature' in Christ after the union, where his humanity was 'absorbed by his divinity'. The text explains that Eutyches, while perhaps not a deliberate Docetist, was a 'confused and unskilled thinker' whose views were nonetheless 'one-sided' and potentially led to significant Christological error if left unchecked. The strength of the theological movement towards Chalcedon, as implicitly championed by the text, lies in its successful development of a 'balanced Christology' that, through formulations like Flavian's 'of two natures after the incarnation', countered such 'swallowed up' notions of humanity.³⁷ However, a weakness in the immediate aftermath of this theological clarification was its practical failure to achieve ecclesiastical peace, directly contributing to the 'growing alienation of Egyptian Christians' and the subsequent violence and condemnation of the 'Robber Synod', illustrating that doctrinal precision, while critical, did not immediately resolve deep-seated divisions. Therefore, the perspectives of Paul Tillich, Harold O. J. Brown, and J.N.D. Kelly's³⁸ On Eutychianism's doctrine of the nature of Christ, this offers valuable insights into the complexities of this theological issue. While Tillich emphasized the unique unity of Christ's nature, Brown upheld the orthodox balance between his divine and human natures, and Kelly provided a historical context for

understanding the development of Christological doctrines in the early church. By considering these differing perspectives, we can deepen our understanding of the nature of Christ and the theological debates that have shaped Christian theology throughout history.

5.0 ASSESSING HERESIES AND ORTHODOXY

5.1. Harold O. J. Brown's Perspectives on Heresies and Orthodoxy

Brown believed that heresies were not simply misunderstandings or disagreements within the faith, but rather dangerous distortions of the actual teachings of the Bible. Brown, in this book, explores the established relationship between orthodoxy and heresy within the Christian theological tradition.³⁹ The central contrast drawn is that orthodoxy prioritizes historical truth, while heresy tends to emphasize intellectual understanding and speculative theology. The author acknowledges the inherent bias that arises when discussing these concepts, as any individual will naturally view their own beliefs as orthodox. However, the author seeks to analyse the distinguishing features of each perspective objectively. Orthodoxy is characterized as appealing to the more historically minded theologians, while heresy attracts those inclined towards philosophical and imaginative exploration. However, it is crucial to ensure that orthodoxy remains dynamic and contextually relevant, avoiding rigid traditionalism that may alienate contemporary believers, particularly within the Nigerian Evangelical context. However, the author notes that a purely pedestrian theology is insufficient; orthodoxy must face conceptual challenges to avoid stagnation.

³⁷ See thoughts from John Hick, ed., *The Myth of God Incarnate*, 2nd edition (London, UK: SCM Press, 2012).

³⁸ Patrick O'Connell reviewed Kelly's book further that, "The great merit of this book is its clear treatment of the development of Christology. We may note that Dr. Kelly will have nothing to do with the so-called differences between the Christology of St Leo and St Cyril of Alexandria. His conclusion is that St Cyril 'would have acquiesced in the Chalcedonian settlement: and would have been embarrassed by the intransigence of his over-

enthusiastic allies' (p.342)." See also Paulsen, David, et al. "Jesus Was Not a Unitarian." *Brigham Young University Studies*, vol. 49, no. 3, 2010, pp. 158–69. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43044816>. Accessed 12 May 2024.

³⁹ Brown, Harold O.J. *Heresies in the Image of Christ in the Mirror of Heresy and Orthodoxy from the Apostles to the Present*. Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1984. 28-29.

For Evangelical Theology, which is rooted in orthodoxy in Nigeria, this highlights the critical importance of a precise and balanced Christology that fully upholds both Christ's deity and humanity, guarding against functional docetism and ensuring a holistic faith that can foster unity and resilience amidst diverse challenges. Hence, Brown suggests that orthodoxy must experience a delicate middle ground, making necessary distinctions without becoming overly complex or dull. This ongoing challenge, Brown argues, is essential for the church to provide a reasoned defence of its beliefs, as exhorted in 1 Peter 3:15.

5.2. Critique of Eutychianism in Light of Historical Christian Doctrines

Eutychianism, a theological position that emerged in the early centuries of Christianity, has been a subject of controversy and critique within the broader Christian tradition. This essay aims to offer a critical examination of Eutychianism in the context of historical Christian doctrines.⁴⁰ For Eutychianism, Christ's divine nature fully absorbed his human nature, resulting in a single, unified nature that is neither fully divine nor fully human, thereby diminishing the importance of Christ's humanity in salvation. This point must be refuted in contemporary theological education. This view stands in contrast to the orthodox Christian doctrine of the hypostatic union, which affirms the full humanity and full divinity of Christ in perfect unity.

One of the primary criticisms of Eutychianism is its departure from the historic Christian understanding of the Incarnation. On the idea of the incarnation, Robert Lowry Calhoun, in the

quest to analyse Tertullian's views, portrayed that.

God can become what he was not without ceasing to be what he was. Consequently, we say that the deity in Jesus Christ becomes incarnate without ceasing to be the deity that it always has been. At the incarnation, therefore, divine nature is not to be thought of as "transformed into flesh." Neither are the two natures fused into a third. Tertullian refers to the fact that gold and silver can be melted together to form electrum, a new type of metal. We must not think of humanity and divinity as thus fused in Jesus Christ so that the resulting person is neither divine nor human but some third sort of being—quid. The two natures, Spirit and flesh, retain their properties.⁴¹

In the above assertion, Eutychianism's denial of Christ's full humanity undermines the significance of the Incarnation, which is central to Christian theology and soteriology. This can lead to a diminished understanding of Christ's empathy and identification with human suffering, which in turn affects pastoral care and discipleship within the Nigerian Evangelical Church.⁴² Eutychianism raises questions about the efficacy of Christ's work on behalf of humanity. If Christ is not fully human, how can he serve as the perfect mediator between God and humanity? How can he sympathize with our weaknesses and temptations if he did not honestly share in our human experience (Cf. Phil. 2:7)? These are important theological concerns that Eutychianism fails to address

⁴⁰ Bobby Grow, "Chalcedonian Logic and the Diminished Christology of The Nashville Statement," Blog, Athanasian Reformed, February 9, 2017, <https://growrag.wordpress.com/2017/09/02/chalcedonian-logic-and-the-diminished-christology-of-the-nashville-statement/>.

⁴¹ Robert Lowry Calhoun, *Scripture, Creed, Theology: Lectures on the History of Christian Doctrine in the First Centuries*, ed. George A. Lindbeck (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011).

⁴² See page Thoughts from Umeanwe's article on the raise of Christian Denominationalism in Nigeria, clearly relates to the Chalcedonian controversy between the

west and the east. Nigerian Evangelical Christianity does not raise to face the impact of technology alone, but also to face denominational segregation as well as Pentecostalism as a major force in Nigeria.

Pentecostalism may not necessarily be a threat to the development Evangelical teachings but the diversity within it is a threat to its own growth and consequently Nigerian Christianity as a whole. See Christian Maduabuchi Umeanwe, "Christianity in Nigeria: The Double-Edged Sword of Denominational Proliferation," *Journal of Theoretical and Empirical Studies in Education* 10, no. 1 (April 2025): 46–69.

adequately.⁴³ Additionally, Eutychianism has been criticised for its potential to undermine the doctrine of salvation. If Christ is not fully human, then how can he represent humanity in his sacrificial death on the cross? The atonement, central to Christian soteriology, relies on the belief that Christ, being both fully divine and fully human, can reconcile humanity to God through His death and resurrection. Eutychianism's denial of Christ's full humanity threatens to undermine this foundational Christian doctrine.

In a contrasting argument, Cross and Coakley observe, "Equally, the identity claims made in the definition of the faith at Chalcedon are unqualified and would naturally be understood all in the same way. But the text includes the following: 'one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten'. These all appear simply to be different labels for one and the same thing, and thus the list presupposes absolute identity."⁴⁴ Cross and Coakley's observation that Chalcedon's declaration of "the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten" represents unqualified identity claims that naturally denote absolute identity for the person of Christ is paramount for understanding its anti-Eutychian stance. By rigorously asserting that these are "different labels for the same thing", the definition unequivocally establishes a singular, unchanging subject, thereby directly refuting the kind of confused or absorptive interpretations of Christ's natures that Eutyches

was accused of promoting. One's theological methodology defines the authenticity and the reliability of a person's research today, not even how one handles the theological concept or doctrine, which also applies to the Christological assessment at the Council of Chalcedon.⁴⁵ Hence, Eutychianism represents a departure from the historic Christian understanding of the Incarnation and the nature of Christ. Its denial of Christ's full humanity raises significant theological concerns and undermines core Christian doctrines such as the hypostatic union and the atonement. It is important for Christians to critically examine and engage with theological positions like Eutychianism to uphold the integrity of our faith and the richness of our theological heritage.⁴⁶

5.3. J.N.D. Kelly's Insights on the Evolution of Christian Doctrine

J.N.D. Kelly, a renowned scholar in the field of early Christian history, has provided invaluable insights into the evolution of Christian doctrine. One of the most fascinating case studies that Kelly engages in is Eutychianism, a theological controversy that shook the early Church.⁴⁷ This belief posed a serious challenge to the orthodox understanding of Christ's nature as both fully human and fully divine, a doctrine that had been affirmed at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD. Kelly viewed that,

Chalcedon is often described as the triumph of the Western, and with it of the

⁴³ See Josh Pannell, "Theological Formulation: The Road to Chalcedon),"

[https://Sermons.Logos.Com/Sermons/1389106-Theological-Formulation:-The-Road-Tochalcedon\)?Sso=false](https://Sermons.Logos.Com/Sermons/1389106-Theological-Formulation:-The-Road-Tochalcedon)?Sso=false), accessed July 15, 2025, [https://sermons.logos.com/sermons/1389106-theological-formulation:-the-road-tochalcedon\)?sso=false](https://sermons.logos.com/sermons/1389106-theological-formulation:-the-road-tochalcedon)?sso=false).

⁴⁴ Cross and Coakley, *Early Scholastic Christology 1050-1250: Changing Paradigms in Historical and Systematic Theology*. Pg. 7-8.

⁴⁵ See thoughts from Williams Wood, "Philosophy and Christian Theology," Web page, with Edward N. Zalta, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Spring Edition 2022, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2022/entries/christi-antheology-philosophy/>.

⁴⁶ See MICHAEL AGAPITO, "How Jesus Is Both God and Man: The Chalcedonian Creed and The Two Natures

of Christ," Web, SOLA Network, November 19, 2019, <https://sola.network/article/the-chalcedonian-creed/>. For Michael, if believers today forget any fact about Christ' incarnation it should not be his new nature. This study would reveal that many Christians are afraid to recognize that Christ became completely human and assumed Man's infirmities on our behalf. He is 100% God and 100% Man—two distinct natures united in one person (hypostasis)—marking the unique Incarnation. If Evangelical theology allows philosophy to cloud their thinking on the logical nature of the incarnation, they will miss the big picture of God's purpose in Christ. The divine act in response to sin exceeds logical constructivism in that it results in human transcendence of the act inside God's universe. God's response to sin is entirely on his own terms (see Rom. 5:8, John 15:16).

⁴⁷ See Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*.

Antiochene, Christology. It is true, of course, that the balanced position attained long since in the West and given expression in Leo's Tome, gave the fathers a model of which they made good use. It is true, also, that without Rome's powerful support, the Antiochene formula 'two natures' would never have been given such prominence.⁴⁸

Kelly's analysis of Eutychianism clarified the process of doctrinal development in the early Church. He shows how theological heresies like Eutychianism forced the Church to clarify and articulate its beliefs more precisely, leading to the formulation of creeds and dogmas that continue to shape Christian theology to this day.⁴⁹ What makes Kelly's insights so valuable is his ability to bring the historical context to life, painting a vivid picture of the intellectual and spiritual struggles that painted a picture of the early Church. Through his interesting research and engaging writing style, Kelly invites readers to journey back in time and witness the debates and discussions that shaped the development of Christian doctrine.

However, Kelly's work is not just a dry academic exercise – it is a passionate defence of the richness and complexity of Christian theology. He shows that the evolution of doctrine is not a sign of weakness or inconsistency, but a testament to the vitality and creativity of the Christian tradition.⁵⁰ By engaging with challenges like Eutychianism, the Church was able to deepen its understanding of the mysteries of faith and articulate them in a way that resonates with believers across the centuries. J.N.D. Kelly's knowledge on the evolution of Christian doctrine, with

Eutychianism as a case study, is a testament to the enduring power and relevance of the Christian tradition. Through his scholarship and enthusiasm, Kelly invites us to explore the rich experience of Christian theology and to appreciate the intellectual and spiritual journey that has shaped our understanding of the faith. Having explored the historical evolution of Christian doctrine and the enduring insights of scholars like J.N.D. Kelly regarding Eutychianism and Chalcedon, this study now turns to the crucial implications of these ancient debates for the contemporary Nigerian Evangelical Church. Understanding these historical precedents is vital for addressing current Christological imbalances and theological syncretism within this context.⁵¹

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE NIGERIAN EVANGELICAL CHURCH

The historical debates surrounding Eutychianism offer crucial lessons for the contemporary Nigerian Evangelical Church, particularly in light of indigenous belief systems and evolving charismatic expressions.⁵² Just as ancient Eutychianism risked diminishing Christ's full humanity by emphasizing only his divine nature, certain contemporary theological trends or syncretistic beliefs in the Nigerian context might inadvertently lean towards similar imbalances.⁵³ For instance, when K. K. Yeo agreed with Vanhoozer's essay demonstrated that,

[I]t is this ontology of Christ that Western Christology struggles with when discussing "high Christology" or "low Christology," Christology "from above, or Christology "from below." It is the same

⁴⁸ Kelly. 341.

⁴⁹ See thoughts from Donald Fairbairn, "The Chalcedonian Definition," *Credo Magazine*, February 18, 2021, <https://credomag.com/2021/02/the-chalcedonian-definition/>.

⁵⁰ See for instance Theodoret, *Ecclesiastical History*, accessed May 2, 2020.

<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/27025.htm>

⁵¹ See instances from Daniel Jordan Smith, "The Pentecostal Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria: Paradoxes of Corruption and Inequality," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 59, no. 1 (March 2021): 103–22, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X2000066X>.

⁵² Barry R. Bickmore, "'Show Them unto No Man': Part 1. Esoteric Teachings and the Problem of Early Latter-Day Saint Doctrinal History," *BYU Studies* 62, no. 1 (2023): 29–60. See further thoughts from Gene L. Green, Stephen T. Pardue, and Khiok-Khng Yeo, eds., *Jesus without Borders: Christology in the Majority World*, Majority World Theology (MWT) (Chicago: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2014).

⁵³ See thoughts from David Gofwan, "Contemporary Theological Relevance of the Incarnation: Addressing Human Suffering in the Nigerian Context," *Humanities and Social Sciences* 13, no. 1 (February 2025): 30–40, <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.hss.20251301.14>.

Christological issue that liberation theology affirms by holding to “both heavenly savior and earthly liberator” (Martínez-Olivieri), and the same issue raised when African Christology believes in indigenous spirituality and Christian faith. My reservation is not with the concepts, but the scope of the concepts, with the single lens of Chalcedon. That is why I still prefer using the compound lenses of the biblical Christologies.⁵⁴

This is important because the church needs to go beyond understanding the incarnate nature of Christ to fundamentally living the incarnation. To what extent do these truths affect our Christian faith and spiritual formation? The evangelical church should and can go beyond just defenders but owners of the Christological truth of scripture. The church can only own Christology by living Christologically, not by just understanding it.⁵⁵ For Yeo, whether Christ is seen as an evangelist or a liberator, our conceptual framework does not change God’s grand plan in Christ Jesus. If the council of Chalcedon only ends in the church’s excitement with the formulations in the Christological debates, then the scope ends as a successful theory. But if it goes further into the church’s ontological ideals, then Chalcedon AD 451 would be a victory no matter what!

Looking closely at the overemphasis on Christ’s miraculous power or divine intervention, while neglecting his human experiences of suffering, temptation, and solidarity with humanity, could inadvertently echo the Eutychian error.⁵⁶ This can lead to a diminished understanding of Christ’s empathetic connection with human suffering and the salvific efficacy of his atoning death, which relies on his full humanity.⁵⁷ Therefore, maintaining the Chalcedonian balance – affirming Christ as truly God and truly human, “without confusion, without change, without division, without separation” – becomes vital to ensure that the gospel proclaimed resonates with the holistic reality of Christ’s person and work, addressing both spiritual and physical human needs. Furthermore, the ancient struggle to define Christ’s nature underscores the perennial challenge of theological leadership and interpretation. In the early church, figures like Eutyches championed specific views that, while perhaps well-intended, deviated from a comprehensive understanding of Christ, causing significant disputes. Similarly, within the Nigerian Evangelical Church, the influence of charismatic leaders or the appeal of novel theological ideas can, if not carefully grounded in scriptural truth and historical orthodoxy, lead to distortions. Just as Harold O. J. Brown emphasized the need for orthodoxy to navigate

⁵⁴ Green, Pardue, and Yeo, *Jesus without Borders*. See additional thoughts from K. K. Yeo, “*Christian Chinese Theology: Theological Ethics of Becoming Human and Holy*,” in *Global Theology in Evangelical Perspective: Exploring the Contextual Nature of Theology and Mission*, ed. Jeffrey P. Greenman and Gene L. Green (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Academic, 2012).

⁵⁵ See Samson Musa, “Ontological Ideals for Christian Living in Nigeria: A Theological-Ethical Enquiry,” in *Christian Living in Contemporary Nigeria: Essays in Honour of Rev. Prof. Bitrus Alkali Sarma*, 1st Ed. (Kagoro, Kaduna State, Nigeria: ETSK, 2024), 79–90.

⁵⁶ Douglas Kuiper, “Pillar and Ground of Truth: The Council of Chalcedon (451): The Background,” *The Standard Bearer: A Reformed Semi-Monthly Magazine* 98, no. 5 (December 2021): 107. Just like the early church and the church fathers, creeds are very important to unite the Church. They are a profound definition of what the truth of scripture meant for the body of Christ. This is not a motion for a creed in this paper but that the Evangelical Church in Nigeria need to revisit this

theoretical challenge for the purpose unity in Nigeria Christian theological education.

⁵⁷ Dirk Krausmüller noted “Leontius of Byzantium’s treatise *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos* begins with a section in which the author demonstrates how the human nature in Christ can be real without being a second hypostasis. Leontius starts from the ontological model of the Cappadocians but modifies it radically when he complements the two sets of qualities that constitute ‘nature’ and ‘hypostasis’ with an unqualified substrate. Introduction of such a substrate, which the Cappadocians had rejected, ensured the reality of the human nature within the hypostasis of the Word because it served to anchor the set of human qualities, which when seen by themselves were considered to be a mere abstraction.” See Dirk Krausmüller, “Making Sense of the Formula of Chalcedon: The Cappadocians and Aristotle in Leontius of Byzantium’s *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos*,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 65, no. 5 (November 2011): 484–513, <https://doi.org/10.1163/157007211X561653>.

a “delicate middle ground” between rigid traditionalism and speculative theology, Nigerian theological discourse must ensure that preaching prioritizes God’s sovereignty over human authority, avoiding practices that could elevate human assertion above divine revelation.⁵⁸ By learning from the Church’s historical engagement with heresies, particularly Eutychianism, the Nigerian Evangelical Church can proactively safeguard its Christological integrity, ensuring that its doctrines are rooted in a full and balanced understanding of Jesus Christ.

7.0 CONCLUSION

This study critically examined the historical theological challenge posed by Eutychianism and the enduring significance of the Chalcedonian Formula, highlighting their profound implications for contemporary Christological orthodoxy within the Nigerian Evangelical Church. The research underscored that the persistent influence of Eutychianism, which contended that Christ’s human nature was absorbed by his divine nature into a single, fused entity, was decisively rejected by the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE. The Chalcedonian Creed, by affirming Christ as both fully divine and fully human “without confusion, without change, without division, without separation,” provided a crucial safeguard against such Christological imbalances. The comparative analysis of Paul Tillich, Harold O. J. Brown, and J.N.D. Kelly’s perspectives further illustrated the complexities and necessity of maintaining a balanced Christology. The study concluded that Eutychianism’s denial of Christ’s full humanity fundamentally undermines the significance of the Incarnation and raises critical questions about the efficacy of Christ’s salvific work,

emphasizing that the atonement relies on Christ being fully human and fully divine. For the Nigerian Evangelical Church, the historical debates offer vital lessons, particularly concerning the risk of inadvertently echoing the Eutychian error by overemphasizing Christ’s miraculous power or divine nature while neglecting his human experiences of suffering and solidarity. Maintaining the Chalcedonian balance is paramount to ensure the gospel resonates with the holistic reality of Christ’s person and work, addressing both spiritual and physical human needs. The broader implication is that theological leadership and contemporary theological ideas within the Nigerian Evangelical Church must be carefully grounded in scriptural truth and historical orthodoxy to prevent distortions, much like Harold O. J. Brown’s emphasis on orthodoxy navigating a “delicate middle ground”. Ultimately, the study advocates for Christians to move beyond merely understanding the incarnate nature of Christ to fundamentally living out this Christological truth, acknowledging His two distinct natures—100% God and 100% Man—united in one person, recognizing that God’s transcendent act in Christ, while beyond full human comprehension, maintains the integrity of both natures.

⁵⁸ Oliver O’Donovan, *Entering into Rest*, vol. 3, Ethics as Theology 3 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2017). Pg.187. For O’Donovan Christ is the true revelation of the completeness of Man. He clearly presented that, “[t]he unfitness of humanity to hear the truth, in general or in particular, prompts us to try to control the situation with a parade of truthful communication that seeks to neutralize the difficulty of truth ill-received, because illusion seems to be the only “truth” that will actually fit the situation.” The man is unfit to the will of without exerting the self, without that

man feels neutral and uninvolved thereby not care for by his maker. This is all to say that Christ met all the requirement of a truth human (the new Adam), meeting the criteria of God as full human while still being God. His new nature is what the Nigerian Evangelical Church should hold unto as a fundamental principle, because using logical to explain Christ new nature would not actually fit the situation. If truth is ill-received it will be passed as an illusion thereby raising faithlessness as against faith is Christ’ Salvific work.

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