

LESSON #7 -
TRIUMPHS AND DEFEATS IN CHURCH HISTORY
The Imperial Church #3
The Two Natures of the God-Man: Alexandria, Antioch,
and the Council of Chalcedon 451 A.D.

Introduction

The Councils of Nicea (325 A.D.) and Constantinople (381 A.D.) affirmed the full deity of Jesus Christ in relation to the Father. It sought to answer the question, was Jesus Christ fully God? But concluding that the Son was essentially divine as was the Father, this only raised the further question, how was his human nature related to his deity? Did the two natures blend? Was Christ more God or more man? Was he one person or did he have dual personality? From the period of 325 A.D. to 451 A.D., major interpretations emerged, many one-sided and distorted, that challenged the Church to think more precisely about defining the relationship of Jesus' two natures to each other and to his "person." The first 4 ecumenical councils dealing with these issues were:

1. Nicea (325)—emphasized the oneness of God (Jesus Christ is of the same nature with the Father--*homoousios*)
2. Constantinople (381)—emphasized the threeness of God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)
3. Ephesus (431)—emphasized the oneness of Jesus Christ (Mary is *theotokos*)
4. Chalcedon (451)—emphasized the twoness of Jesus Christ (*two physes* or "natures")

The decisive conclusion came in the formula produced at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. Two schools of theological thought, the Alexandrian and the Antiochene, framed the preceding debate about the nature of Christ.

I. The Alexandrian School

The Alexandrian theologians claimed such luminaries as Athanasius and the great Origen. The Alexandrians were influenced by the philosophy of Plato. They tended to elevate the spiritual—Christ's deity—at the expense of his humanity. This can be seen in the theology of Apollinarius (ca. 390 A.D.), a friend of Athanasius and Basil the Great as well as a teacher of the great Jerome. He argued that Jesus was fully God but his "rational soul" was supplied by the divine Logos. This meant that Jesus was not completely human. Further, this position impacted the doctrine of salvation for how could Christ sufficiently die for humans if he was not totally a man himself?

Apollinarius' construction was rejected by Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, and especially by Theodore of Mopsuestia of the Antiochene school. The doctrine was anathematized at the Council of Constantinople (381 A.D.).

II. The Antiochene School

A. Theodore of Mopsuestia (393-428 A.D.)

The Antiochene theologians were influenced by Aristotle, who saw man as a unity of soul and body, not a dichotomy. These theologians gave far more importance to the humanity of Jesus than to his divinity, to his two natures than to

his single divine nature emphasized by Alexandria. Among the thinkers of this school was Theodore, bishop of Mopsuestia. He and his followers insisted on the integrity of the human nature of Christ. Pressed to an extreme the position issued in what was condemned as the Nestorian heresy.

B. Nestorius, bishop of Constantinople (428-451 A.D.)

Nestorius was a presbyter and head of a monastery in Antioch when the emperor Theodosius II chose him to be the bishop of Constantinople in 428. He became embroiled in controversy over the proper use of the phrase "Mother of God" to describe Mary. A presbyter, Anastasius, under Nestorius had preached against the use of this phrase contending that Mary was not and could not be said to be the mother of the divine nature in Christ, but only of the human. He was attacked for this by the monks and the people and defended by Nestorius, his bishop.

Nestorius maintained that instead of "Mother of God," *theotokos*, Mary would be better designated "Mother of Christ," *Christotokos*, a view which many of Alexandrian persuasion thought was a denial of Christ's divinity. Nestorius thought the Alexandrians were mixing the human and divine natures; in response he sought to maintain an absolute distinction between the 2 natures. He viewed Christ analogously to a Siamese twin. Since he believed the divine nature could not experience suffering or change, he maintained the two natures were artificially joined. The Alexandrians charged Nestorius with holding 2 distinct persons in Christ, a divine and a human person, but that there was no real union. Nestorius and his supporters, for their part, thought that the phrase "Mother of God" made Mary a goddess. Rather, they taught, she was the mother of the man who was assumed by God, the Logos, and nothing should be said that might imply she was the "Mother of God."

Nestorius' book, *Bazaar* [Proceedings] of *Heracleides*, written while in exile, shows that he was condemned for a position he did not really hold. Nevertheless, his choice of words and expressions left him open to the charge made by the Alexandrians. He maintained that:

"With the one name Christ we designate at the same time two natures ... The essential characteristics in the nature of the divinity and in the humanity are from all eternity distinguished."

"God the Word is also named Christ because He has always conjunction with Christ. And it is impossible for God the Word to do anything without the humanity, for all is planned upon an intimate conjunction, not on the deification of the humanity."

He thus maintained and emphasized the reality and completeness of the human nature in Christ. He believed, he said, in "both natures which by the highest and unmixed union are adored in the one person of the Only Begotten." Though he is eloquent in distinguishing our Lord's 2 natures, he had difficulty finding ways to

express clearly the unity of the natures in one person. Cf. the analogy of the “jumping-jack” exercise of 2 individuals.

III. The Council of Ephesus and Cyril of Alexandria 431 A.D.

Cyril, bishop of Alexandria 412-444 A.D., led the opposition against Nestorius, motivated, perhaps, by personal ambition and jealousy. Following the Alexandrian tradition, Cyril believed that the human in Christ was made divine by the incarnation. Though he rejected the view of Apollinarius and held that Christ’s humanity was complete, possessing body, soul, and spirit, he really stood very near to Apollinarius (Walker). Though he spoke of the union of two natures in Christ, the only personality was that of the Word, the Logos. The Word clothed himself (“took flesh”) with humanity but a humanity that had no personality apart from the Word/Logos. Jesus was not an individual man. Cyril held though there was an interchange of qualities between the divine and human, yet each is a complete nature. From the two natures came one and that one personality is divine. It was therefore “God made flesh, who was born, who died, of whom we partake in the Supper, and whose making divine of humanity is the proof and means that we, too, shall be made partakers of the divine nature” (Walker). “If the school of Antioch came near such a separation of the divine and the human as to leave Christ only the Son of God by adoption, that of Cyril allowed Him little more than an impersonal humanity absorbed in divinity” (Walker).

The emperors Theodosian II and Valentinian III called an ecumenical council to meet in Ephesus in 431 A.D. Before the arrival of the eastern bishops (John, bishop of Antioch and the Syrian bishops), who were known to favor Nestorius, and in the absence of Nestorius himself (he refused to appear, though summoned), Cyril organized the council and secured the condemnation of Nestorius. Nestorius was ultimately deposed and banished, dying in exile (A.D. 439) and the Alexandrian view prevailed. The emperor had Nestorius’ books burned and many of his supporters became silent. Yet many who held to his theological emphases continued to promote these views in eastern Syria and Persia. Nestorian missionaries in the 7th c. penetrated also to southern India and even China.

IV. Eutychianism

It became clear that neither the rigid two-nature model of Nestorius nor the careless one-nature model of Apollinarius corresponded with the Biblical data. Jesus’ 2 natures seemed to be in perfect communion (cf. the woman at the well, John 4). What was needed was a theory which would combine the strength of both proposals of Nestorius and Apollinarius. A monk of Constantinople named Eutyches sought to provide a model of Christ which would combine the strengths of both. He proposed a construction which mixed the two natures to form a third confused mixture such that Christ was not fully God or man. The human nature was so thoroughly absorbed into the divine that even the bodily element in it was different from the ordinary human body. Eutyches’ position came to be known as Monophysitism (“one nature”). His formulation gave lip-service to the humanity of Christ but only as an abstraction. For from the moment of Christ’s conception, the divinity was the acting subject in the person of Christ. Christ was essentially a divine being. At a synod in Constantinople

in 448, the city's bishop Flavian presiding, Eutyches was deposed and excommunicated for teaching the one-nature of Christ (Monophysitism).

V. The Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.)

Monophysitism now became generalized. The absorption of the human nature by the divine was viewed as a mixture of the two in a third new nature corresponding to neither of the previous two. But it was the council of Chalcedon in 451 which provided the final form to the definition of the relations of the human and divine elements in Christ. It was the largest of the ancient councils, consisting of approximately 451 bishops. They were all easterners except for some Roman delegates and two North African bishops.

This council agreed to draw up a new definition of Faith based on (1) the Creed of Nicea; (2) its confirmation at Constantinople; (3) its exposition by Cyril at Ephesus; and (4) as set forth by Leo's *Tome*. The latter was a letter sent to the council by Leo, bishop of Rome, outlining the Roman church's position. This council maintained both the true divinity and the perfect humanity of our Lord. The divinity and the humanity co-exist in Christ's one person without *intermixture*, without *transmutation*, without *division*, and without *separation*. This is now called the Chalcedonian formula and is the received standard for Western Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestant orthodoxy. It rejects the two natures forming of a "third something" of Apollinarius, and the two persons allegedly taught by Nestorius, and the one nature taught by Eutyches. The formula does not really explain how the two natures became one person; it simply marks out the boundaries of acceptable speculation. It preserved the "mystery" of the incarnation rather than offered an explanation of it. Jesus is undiminished deity plus perfect humanity united in one person without any confusion of the two natures. Jesus is simply the God-man! The creed reads:

"We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhood and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body; consubstantial [coessential/ homoousian] with the Father according to Deity, and consubstantial [coessential/ homoousian] with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Deity, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God [theotokos/ God-bearer, but cf. Lk. 1:43], according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, *inconfusedly*, *unchangeably*, *indivisibly*, *inseparably*; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets from the beginning have declared concerning him, and the Lord Jesus himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us."

VI. Continuance of Monophysitism and Monothelitism

The Council of Chalcedon formally closed the Christological controversy for the West but in the East the debates persisted. Many of the Eastern churches regarded Chalcedon as the definitive statement on the nature and person of Christ but others persisted in maintaining Monophysite positions. Many variant forms of Monophysitism soon developed. Many attempts were made in the 5th and 6th centuries to reconcile the Monophysites to Chalcedonian orthodoxy but without avail. In the 6th century, the Monophysites consolidated themselves in three great churches: (1) the Copts and Abyssinians, (2) the Syrian Jacobites, and (3) the Armenians. The Jacobites were named after Jacob Baradaeus (A.D. 541-578) who provided strong leadership to the party. The Monophysites were persecuted and increasingly isolated to churches of their own in Abyssinia and Syria. All of these bodies accept the fathers of the Church prior to Chalcedon, and in their liturgical documents even appear to confess the orthodox Christology but in Monophysite terms. Yet individual members have sometimes followed the heterodox teaching of Eutyches and his disciples.

Monothelitism did not appear until the 7th c. It maintained there was only one will in the God-man Jesus Christ. The theological issues at stake in this development were closely similar to those raised by Monophysitism. Did Christ have two wills, a human and a divine, or only one will which was divine? The ensuing controversy was finally settled by the *Council of Constantinople of 680 A.D.* It condemned the Monothelitic formulas and their adherents, and proclaimed the existence of two wills in Christ, divine and human, to be the orthodox faith.

Conclusion

The miracle of the incarnation is a supreme mystery. The Council of Chalcedon, at best, simply reflects a consensus among Christians as to the language necessary to preserve both the complete deity and humanity of Jesus in his one person. A complete salvation hinges on this identity. The God-man, Jesus Christ, alone is able to procure it.