



## Christological Controversies

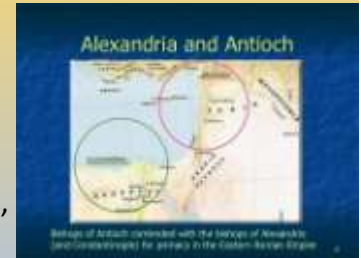
Fourth Through Seventh Centuries

### Introduction

- The adoption of Nicene theology at the Council of Constantinople (381) inadvertently created problems of Christology.
- The Creed made it clear Christ was divine, but the Gospels make it clear that Jesus was also a man.
  - So how could He be both at the same time?
- Arian arguments were countered with Nicene friendly arguments, but not all counters were the same. Why?
  - It is one thing to settle on the divinity of Christ, but without a definitive statement on how His divinity and humanity relate to each other, alternative Christologies will emerge.
- Here are some questions that needed to be worked out.
  - For God to become a man, did He surrender His divine attributes of omnipresence and omnipotence? If so, then He was not fully God.
  - If God is impassable and does not suffer, hunger, or die, how can Jesus be God and still suffer, hunger, and die?
  - Scripture clearly affirms that Christ is God and Jesus is Christ. It also affirms that Jesus came in the flesh.
  - How can Jesus be fully man and fully God, but not be two people?

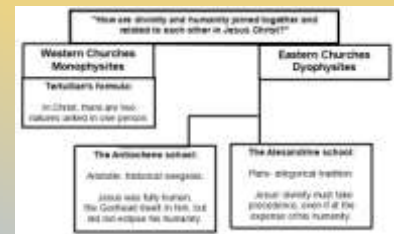
## Two Schools of Theology and Thought

- First, it should be noted that there were two different ways of thinking about this.
  - The theologians of Antioch, which were representative of the Antiochene school, focused on the literal, historical meaning of Scripture.
  - In contrast, the theologians of Alexandria, which were representative of the Alexandrian school, focused on a deeper allegorical meaning.
  - So it makes sense their different approaches will yield different answers to these questions.
- The Antiochenes produced the following leaders: Diodore of Tarsus (died 394), Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428), Nestorius (381-451), Ibas of Edessa (died 457), and Theodoret of Cyrillus (393-458).
- The Antiochenes literal view of Scripture made it impossible for them to minimize Christ's clear humanity.
  - He was fully human. He was a real human being like us with complete human nature: body and soul (mind or spirit).
  - Note: Dichotomy and Trichotomy were still being debated.



## Two Schools of Theology and Thought

- The Antiochenes emphasized the distinction between Christ's human and divine natures.
  - If they did not keep the two natures apart, then the weaknesses the Gospels show of His human nature would be wrongly applied to His divine nature.
  - By definition God cannot be weak or limited. If you can apply Christ's human limitations to His divinity, you destroy His divinity and prove the Arians right.
  - At the same time, if you ascribe the divine powers to His humanity, then you make Him a super human rather than a human like us.
- To avoid this, they kept the two natures as far apart as possible, sometimes even splitting Him into two persons (at least according to their opponents).
  - They were criticized for holding to two Sons, a divine and a human. Some Antiochenes did think this way and even saw the Divine filling and working through a regular human.
  - Followed to its conclusion, Jesus is little more than the ideal example of God dwelling and working through a man.



## Two Schools of Theology and Thought

- The Alexandrian school produced leaders like Athanasius, Apollinarius (300-390), Didymus the Blind (died 398), Cyril of Alexandria (died 444), and Eutyches (378-454).
- This school emphasized the divine nature in Christ.
  - The activity of salvation must be the activity of the divine Creator Himself. So the words, actions, and experiences of Christ in the Gospels are not so much that of a human person, but of God Himself.
  - Some Alexandrians pushed so far as to claim the Logos was the supreme, or even the only, source of activity in Christ.
  - Whereas the Antiochenes separated the natures, the Alexandrians united them into a oneness—always at the expense of the human nature.
- Christ's human nature was simply a tool taken up and used by the Divine Son. The human nature of Christ had little agency, activity, or power of its own.
  - In their insistence on His divine nature, Alexandrians often accepted a less than fully human nature—usually by denying a human soul or mind (even Athanasius wasn't clear on this).
  - The fear was if you place any emphasis on a human soul or mind, you split Christ into two persons, two Sons. At that point, you could not say Jesus is the Son, but in some way relates to Him.

## Apollinarius of Laodicea 300-390

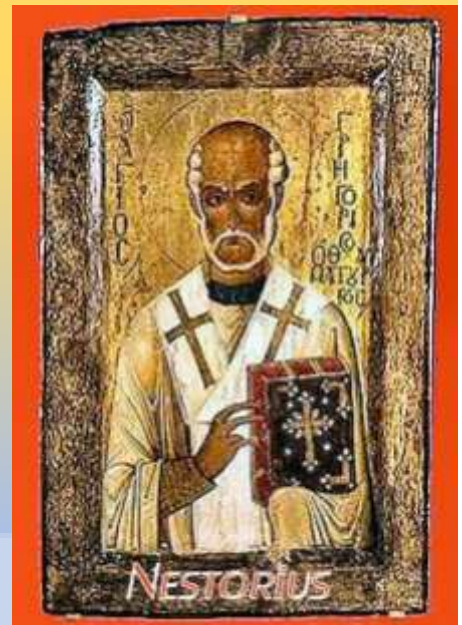
- Apollinarius (friend of Athanasius and strong anti-Arian) answered the questions by diminishing Christ's humanity.
- However, Apollinarius got into trouble for openly teaching that Christ had a human body and spirit, but not a human soul.
  - In Alexandrian theology, the human mind or soul was the source of all human weakness and sin, so he reasoned Christ did not have one.
  - The Logos was His soul. So Christ was a divine mind in a human body.
  - Apollinarius was also convinced that if Christ were fully human (i.e., having a mind/soul), then it would split Him apart into two separate persons.
- Gregory of Nazianzus (one of the Cappadocian Fathers) and others condemned Apollinarius's teaching, and the Council of Constantinople, 381, agreed.
  - Christ cannot save what He does not assume. Therefore, if He did not assume a full human nature, then how can He save humanity? Humans are comprised of body and soul.
  - Therefore, Christ's human nature required both. Otherwise, Christ would not have saved and sanctified human minds, and therefore is not the savior of fallen souls. The spiritual renewal of our minds depends on Christ having a mind.
- One positive result of this is it shocked the Alexandrians into rethinking the relationship between the two natures of Christ.

## Nestorius 386-450

- Nestorius (386-450), Bishop of Constantinople, was at first assumed to be orthodox.
- The Antiochene school reacted fiercely against Apollinarianism, and insisted on the completeness of Christ's human nature, and its absolute distinction from divine nature.
  - Theodore of Mopsuestia was Nestorius's teacher, and he was the leading Antiochene thinker.
  - Around this time, Theodore made a stand against a popular title for Mary, *theotokos*. He insisted this wrong, that she only bore the human nature of Christ.
  - The Alexandrians staunchly promoted the title of Mary. If Jesus is God, then the one in the womb of Mary was God. This debate will lead to the next Christological controversy.
- Nestorius became a popular and powerful preacher. He was made the Bishop of Constantinople.
  - He took up Theodore's charge against *theotokos*. This will make him an enemy with the deepest thinking and most influential of all the Alexandrians, Cyril.

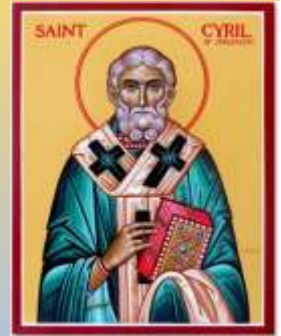
## Nestorius 386-450

- He argued it is pagan to argue that passable things like birth and death can be applied to divinity.
  - Or if it's not pagan, then it is Arian.
- He further argued what was incarnated in the womb by God was not itself God, and what was buried in the tomb was not God itself.
- His solution was a dyophysite Christ: a Christ with two natures.
  - He believed he could attribute some Jesus's acts to the human nature and others to the divine nature.



## Cyril of Alexandria 376-444

- Cyril of Alexandria was Nestorius's chief opponent. He was Patriarch of Alexandria from 412-444.
- He accused Nestorius of spreading false teaching about Christ.
- Cyril was undoubtedly brilliant, but he made doctrinal debates personal quarrels.
  - He was not satisfied to defeat an opponent's position, but he also sought to destroy the man.
  - He possessed a hatred of Antiochene theology in general, and so he inspired tribalism and partisanship in the ancient church. He engendered deep loyalty from those in his camp and hatred from those opposed to him.
  - Because he opposed Antiochene theology, he opposed whoever was the Patriarch of Constantinople. His uncle brought down John Chrysostom when he was Patriarch of Constantinople, and he saw it as his need to carry on the rivalry. They were jealous that Antiochene theology held greater sway over the East than the Alexandrians.
  - So when Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, pushed a position Cyril thought was heretical, he was determined to destroy him as a person.



## Cyril of Alexandria 376-444

- He argued from the actual words of the Nicene Creed, They say the only begotten Son himself came down, was incarnate, made man, and suffered.
  - Therefore, the incarnation rendered a unity rather than division in Christ. As such, the Logos was born to Mary and died on the cross.
  - The Logos is the subject of the incarnation. There are not two subjects. It's not that the Son performs divine actions while the man performs human actions. One subject, the Logos, performs both actions.
- Unfortunately, the language was not precise. It sounded like a denial that Christ had two distinct natures.
  - Cyril demanded that Nestorius accept the Alexandrian claim that in Christ there is only "one incarnate nature of the Logos." Nestorius could not agree.
  - Part of it has to do with confusion of language. The word Cyril used for nature, *phusis*, means nature. Cyril, however, did not mean to deny that Christ had a both a human and divine nature.
  - The confusion came in the fact that after the Cappadocians convinced everyone to agree to the term hypostasis for the three persons, both Alexandria and Antioch continued to use hypostasis and *phusis* as synonyms.
  - Hypostasis means person and *phusis* means nature. Person and nature are not exactly the same, but they were still being used as the same. So when Cyril said Christ had one *phusis*, he meant person. Jesus of Nazareth was not a different person from the Logos.
  - When Nestorius says Christ is two *phuseis*, Cyril thought he argued for two persons. It is true that some Antiochenes did see it that way.
  - Since Nestorius denied that Mary was *theotokos*, Cyril was convinced he split Christ into two persons.



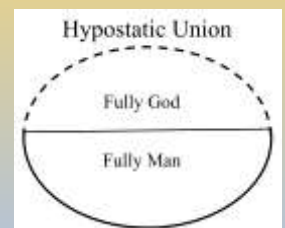
## Council of Ephesus, 431

- Cyril convinced the Patriarch of Rome (Celestine) and the Emperor (Theodosius II) to summon an ecumenical council in Ephesus.
- Cyril opened the council before Nestorius's supporters could arrive.
  - They declared him a heretic and deposed him as Patriarch of Constantinople. It's alleged that Cyril even bribed bishops to vote in favor of this.
  - Starting the council before Nestorius's allies arrived rigged the result.
- Nestorius's followers cried foul and opened their own alternative council under the leadership of John of Antioch.
  - They voted to depose Cyril.
- Theodosius II intervened and took Cyril's side. He was reinstated, his council was (and still is) counted as the third ecumenical council, and Nestorius was exiled.
- The council also condemned Pelagianism as a heresy.



## Fragile Peace

- The issue was not settled. Many bishops thought Cyril and Theodosius II did Nestorius wrong.
- The emperor wanted peace, and so he worked out a compromise statement between Cyril and John of Antioch.
  - It was called "*Formula of Union, 433.*"
  - John and the Antiochenes would accept Nestorius's banishment and the term *theotokos*, and Cyril would accept a statement of faith with the Antiochene language that Christ is one person with two natures: divine and human. This is the hypostatic union.
- Cyril claimed this is what he argued for all along.
  - His Alexandrian friends felt betrayed and hated the language of "two natures." Peace was achieved for only a decade.
- Once John of Antioch and Cyril died—John in 441 and Cyril in 444—the controversy erupted again.



## Eutyches, 378-454

- This time, the controversy centered around a man from Constantinople named Eutyches who espoused an extreme form of Alexandrianism.
  - He argued that Christ's humanity was entirely swallowed up by the divinity.
  - Therefore, the incarnate Son had only one nature: divine.
- The new Patriarch of Alexandria, Dioscorus (died 454) supported him.
- The Patriarch of Constantinople, Flavian (447-449) condemned Eutyches.
  - Eutyches's opponents accused him of promoting a mutant Christ, or a third thing (*tertium quid*).
  - The Council of Chalcedon 451 condemned this teaching.

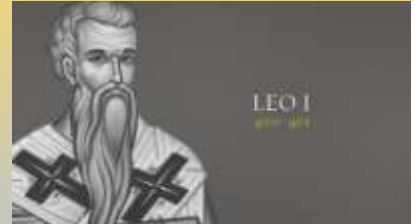


## Robber's Synod

- Dioscorus hated Antiochene theology and Constantinople much like Cyril did, but he lacked the theological depth. He was a thug.
- Theodosius II summoned another council of Ephesus in 449.
- Sadly, Dioscorus used violence and thug tactics to silence opposition.
  - They voted for Eutyches to be reinstated, outlawed the Formula of Union, deposed Patriarch Flavian—along with the famous Bible commentator Theodoret of Cyrrhus, and Ibas of Edessa (mediator between Nestorius and Cyril).
- They also disregarded Pope Leo I's Tome.
  - The East requested that the Bishop of Rome attend, but invasions from the Huns made that difficult. So Leo sent a statement of Western Christology that was phenomenal. Dioscorus's council rejected it.

## Leo I, 400-461

- Leo was the greatest theologian to hold the Bishop of Rome to this point. Some argue he is the founder of the papacy.
- He advanced the argument of Petrine theory, namely that Christ made Peter the head of the church, and Peter was the first bishop of Rome.
- As such, the bishops of Rome were Peter's successors and held a primary position over all other bishops.
- Therefore, the Bishop of Rome is the final court of appeal for all Christians and should accept all doctrinal statements from them.
- Since Leo thought this way about himself, he was outraged that they refused to read the Tome.



## Robber's Synod

- The Alexandrian victory at this council even led to the death of Flavian as Alexandrian monks beat him up so severely that he died from the injuries.
- The new Patriarch of Constantinople was an Alexandrian with the same mentality as Dioscorus.
- Leo called it the Robber's Synod, a name which stuck to this day. It is NOT counted as an ecumenical council.
- Theodosius II was determined to back the council's decision and enforce it.





## Council of Chalcedon, 451

- Theodosius II died in a riding accident in 450, and the new Emperor Marcian (450-457) sided with the Romans and the Antiochenes.
  - In 451, he summoned a new council to do what the last one failed to do. This was summoned to Chalcedon, which was close to Constantinople.
- There were over 400 bishops, most from the East, and there were some ambassadors from Leo, along with his Tome.
- It was still a difficult assembly.
  - Most bishops were loyal to Cyril, and they opposed Eutyches and Dioscorus. They were unsure how to express Cyril's theology in a way that would reject Eutyches teaching.
  - Cyril's language could be co-opted by the heretics, so Leo's ambassadors intervened with the support of representatives from the emperor. They gave an ultimatum.
  - Either come up with a new formula to express the relationship of Christ's two natures, or Leo would refuse to recognize the proceedings.
- A compromise was reached where they stated Christ was incarnate IN two natures rather than FROM two natures (Eutyches could co-opt this, but not the other).
  - The new formula satisfied Leo, the Emperor, and most of the Eastern bishops. Even the new Patriarch of Constantinople abandoned his friend Dioscorus and gave support.
  - It pleased all parties except the Alexandrians and some Syrians.

## Council of Chalcedon, 451

- The end result was the Chalcedonian Creed, 451.
  - It was a blend of Alexandrian and Antiochene Christologies.
  - It also used specific language to condemn three heretical Christologies: Apollonarius, Nestorius, and Eutyches.
  - I will read it from pages Needham 304-305.
- Some Alexandrians and Syrians rejected the Chalcedon's brilliant Christological statement.
  - Those who wanted to deny either part or all of Christ's humanity were condemned as monophysites.
  - They were committed to Cyril's language of one nature before he accepted the compromised language of the hypostatic union. They were not Apollinarian or Eutychean.
- The state took it upon itself to enforce the decision with the sword.
  - Many regions use this issue as an excuse to declare their regional independence. They reject the Chalcedonian decision.



## Independent National Churches

- Many regions use this issue as an excuse to declare their regional independence. They reject the Chalcedonian decision.
- The Egyptian church declared itself as Monophysite since many Monophysites were based in Alexandria.
  - They made their liturgical language as Coptic. Today they are called the Coptic Orthodox Church.
- Many in the Syrian church also embraced Monophysite doctrine and used the language of Syriac.
  - Both groups saw themselves as rebels against Constantinople's Greek imperialism.
- The Armenian church and Ethiopian church followed suit.
- This was the official splintering of the Orthodox Church in the East.
  - Today each group claims to be the true church with Apostolic Succession.
- The largest Nestorian school was in Edessa between the Tigris and Euphrates. The emperor closed the school, so it moved across the Parthian border and set its base up in the Persian empire.
  - In 486 it was recognized as the "official Christianity" of Persia.
  - They spread east making it as far as China's capital of time Si-Ngan-fou in 781



## Later Christological Issues

- Although the decision of Chalcedon is one of the most Biblically accurate assessments of the nature of Christ, the controversy would not die down.
- The church wanted an official declaration against the Monophysites, and so the second Council of Constantinople in 553 condemned them.
- Offshoots of Monophysitism then emerged. There were some who accepted two natures, but demanded that the two natures be united by one will of Christ, a divine will.
  - We call these the monothelites.
  - Maximus the Confessor was their famous opponent. So was Pope Stephen. Maximus rightly argued for dyothelitism—Since Christ has two natures, He must also have two wills since each nature has a will. To deny this would deny His full humanity.
  - Also consider Matthew 26:39.
  - The monothelites were condemned at the third Council of Constantinople in 681.



## Communicatio Idiomatum

- Communication of Attributes: The Logos becomes man; this “becoming” enacts such a strong union between humanity and divinity that **we can predicate properties of the man Jesus to the divine Son and vice versa.**
- “Is this contradictory doublespeak? No. It is the paradox and mystery of the incarnation. It is an expression of faith in the one person, ‘one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ’ (i.e., the hypostatic union). It was none other than God who was born, suffered, died, and rose. Without allowing our speech to use the device of *communicatio idiomatum* we inevitably slip into a form of Nestorianism (even if Nestorius himself did not, or did not intentionally, do so). We would have to speak of Jesus, but not the Son, being born of Mary. Jesus, but not the Son of God, who suffered and died. If we speak like this, why do we credit God with our salvation? And why do we worship Jesus, who is merely human? Our Christian language is ripped apart at the seams. On the other hand, if we embrace *communicatio idiomatum*, we can easily answer the question: How can we justify speaking in this way of an impassible God suffering? Answer: Because of the hypostatic union—the divine and the human are united in the selfsame person/hypostasis of Christ.” —David Wilhite, *The Gospel According to Heretics*
- To be clear: “It is not that God suffers or is frail in his divinity, but rather than in the person of the Son, the attributes of human finite are truly those of the eternal Son through the fragility of his “becoming human.” — Aaron Riches, *Ecco Homo*

## Communicatio Idiomatum

Theologically speaking ...	Can God die? No. God is immortal.
Christologically speaking ...	<i>Did God die? Yes!</i>
Theologically speaking ...	Can God change? No. God is immutable.
Christologically speaking ...	<i>Did God change? Yes!</i>
Theologically speaking ...	Can God be tempted? No. God is impeccable.
Christologically speaking ...	<i>Did God experience temptation? Yes!</i>
Theologically speaking ...	Does God have a mom? Not eternally.
Christologically speaking ...	<i>Did Mary become God’s mother? Yes!</i>

## Conclusion

- The orthodox and Biblical position concerning Christology is that Jesus Christ is completely deity, but He has a human and divine nature.
  - They are without separation, division, and confusion.
  - He is one person with these two natures and He also has two wills.
  - These wills are not in conflict with one another. He is not a split personality.
  - His human will agrees with His divine will at every moment.
- And despite all the philosophical language it took to get here, all of this agrees with the testimony of Scripture.