

Trinitarian Controversy 2 (428-451)

by Sean Finnegan (www.christianmonotheism.com)

John Chrysostom's Demise (347-407)

- John Chrysostom was an indefatigable preacher, a pastor more than a theologian, and an ascetic
- he was a strong proponent of the doctrine of incomprehensibility
- emperor decided to have Chrysostom the honest and eloquent preacher of Antioch ordained patriarch of Constantinople and forced Theophilus to perform the service
- people started falsifying innocent remarks in his sermons
- he took an interest in a widow whom Eudoxia had dispossessed
- a large group of monks led by the four "Tall Brothers" came from Alexandria to Chrysostom in Constantinople to lodge a complaint about Theophilus, Bishop of Alexandria who had branded them heretics and banished them from Egypt for their Origenist leanings
- Chrysostom tried to negotiate with Theophilus, but Theophilus refused
- the brothers got the government involved who called a council where Chrysostom would sit in judgment on Theophilus.
- Theophilus showed up with a host of Egyptian bishops, against the imperial decree, and campaigned against Chrysostom vigorously
- Theophilus held the Synod of the Oak in 403 and condemned Chrysostom on some trumped up charges and convinced the emperor to banish him
- Chrysostom went with the soldiers without protest but after a day Eudoxia had a miscarriage and believed it was God's judgment for what she had done to Chrysostom and recalled him
- Chrysostom was exiled again in 404
- he was sent to Lower Armenia then to Arabissus in 405 then to Pityus on the Black Sea then to the village of Comana where he died due to exhaustion, having been forced to march relentlessly without a chance to rest

Cyril of Alexandria (376-444)

- Cyril (b. of Alexandria 412-444), nephew of Theophilus
- prolific writer, theologian, bishop, preacher, politician
- took part in the Synod of the Oak in 403
- Hans von Campenhausen: "For the rest of his life Theophilus regarded the removal of Chrysostom from his throne, which resulted from that Synod, as a justified triumph of his Church. The memory of this event determined Cyril's career in the same way as Athanasius had been influenced by his participation in the Council of Nicaea."¹
- he was a fierce heresy hunter and dogmatic polemicist
- he despised tolerance and whenever possible exercised his power to suppress any and all opposition in his territory
- Hypatia (murdered in 415)
- distorted Nestorius' views
- persecuted Christians that did not agree with him in Alexandria, instigated mob violence against the pagans, and tried to usurp and control the Roman governor

¹ Hans von Campenhausen, *The Fathers of the Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Inc. 2000), 159.

- when Jewish violence erupted killing some Christians he expelled them from Alexandria by force and seized their synagogues

Nestorius (386-451)

- struggles/controversies in 5th/6th centuries
 - over Jesus' divine and human natures
 - Platonic and Stoic teaching emphasized God's immutability and transcendence while generally disparaging the human body
 - it was hard for them to imagine God combining with humanity without transforming the humanity into divinity
- bishop of Constantinople (428-431)
- Nestorius attacked heretics and said to Theodosius II, "Give me, my prince, the earth purged of heretics, and I will give you heaven as a reward. Assist in destroying heretics, and I will assist you in vanquishing the Persians" (Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, 7.29)
- he attacked an Arian church, quietly but illegally and had it destroyed and Arians set fire and burned surrounding area but Nestorius was blamed
- confident, intelligent, defender of orthodoxy
- theotokos controversy
 - Mary is God-bearer
 - since the 3rd c. Mary was called theotokos
 - Origen, Eusebius, Athanasius
 - Nestorius called her Christotokos or Anthroptokos
 - Nestorius' opponents (Cyril of Alexandria) accused him of splitting Christ into two distinct beings
 - the human person who was born of Mary
 - the divine Word who indwelt him

Pulcheria, Empress (399-453)

- empress (older sister of Theodosius II)
- took oath as a virgin
- she was allowed to take communion in part of the church where only clergy were allowed
- she was a big Mary supporter
- Nestorius refused her access
- She replied, "Why? Haven't I given birth to God?" (she spoke as if for all women)
- He replied, "You have given birth to the devil"
- she worked with Cyril of Alexandria to depose Nestorius
- Rome and Alexandria wanted to weaken Constantinople

Letters between Nestorius and Cyril

- Nestorius' letter to Cyril
To his most pious and God-loving fellow bishop, Cyril, Nestorius sends greetings in the Lord.

(1) I dismiss the outrages against me of your amazing letters as deserving healing forbearance and of being answered in due season through circumstances themselves. But as to that which

does not permit of silence, since it involves great danger if silence be kept, of this, as far as I may be able, I shall attempt to make a concise statement without exerting myself to wordiness, being on my guard against the nausea of obscure and indigestible tediousness. I shall begin from the very wise utterances of your charity, citing them in your very words. Which, therefore, are the utterances of the amazing teaching of your letters?

...(7) Everywhere in sacred Scripture whenever it makes mention of the “economy” of the Lord, the birth for our sake and the Passion are ascribed, not to the divinity, but to the humanity of Christ. So according to the most precise appellation, the Holy Virgin is called the Mother of Christ, not the Mother of God. Listen to these words of the Gospels that say, “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” It is plain that God the Word was not the son of David.

...(10) But you do well to cling to your anxiety for those scandalized, and I give thanks that your spirit, anxious over things divine, took thought of our affairs. But realize that you have been led astray by those condemned by the holy synod as Manichean sympathizers of the clerics who perhaps share your opinions. ...These are our counsels, as of a brother to a brother.

...(11) I and those with me greet especially all the brotherhood with you. May you continue to be vigorous in Christ and pray for us, my most God-loving friend who is dear to me in every way.²

- Cyril’s letter to Nestorius

To the most pious and most God-loving fellow bishop Nestorius, Cyril and the synod assembled in Alexandria from the diocese of Egypt send greetings in the Lord.

(1) Since our Savior distinctly says, “He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me,” what shall we suffer who are demanded by your reverence to love you more than Christ, the Savior of us all? Who on the day of judgment will be able to help us? What kind of defense shall we find, if we valued silence so long about the blasphemies that came to be on your part against him? If you injured only yourself by thinking and teaching such things, our concern would be less. You have scandalized the whole church, and you have cast a leaven of strange and foreign heresy among the people, not only among those there (i.e., at Constantinople) but everywhere.

(2) The books of your statements were handed round. What kind of an account will suffice for the silence of those with us, or how it will suffice for the silence of those with us, or how is it not necessary to remember Christ saying “Do not think that I have come to send peace upon the earth but a sword. For I came to set a man at variance with his father, and a daughter with her mother.” When the faith is being injured, let reverence toward parents be dismissed as obsolete and unstable! Let the law of warm affection toward children and kinsmen be silenced! Let death hereafter be better for the pious than life, “that they might find a better resurrection” according to the Scriptures!

² *Saint Cyril of Alexandria, Letters 1-50*, ed. and trans. John I. McEnerney (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press 1987).

(3) Therefore, together with the holy synod, which has been assembled in the great city of Rome with our most holy and God-revering brother and fellow servant, Celestine the bishop, presiding, we also solemnly charge you by this third letter, advising you to desist from the doctrines, so wicked and perverted, which you think and teach. ...

(4) It is not possible for us to disregard churches so disturbed and people scandalized and true faith being set aside and flocks being torn asunder by you who ought to preserve him....

...(11)...We confess that he, the Son begotten of God the Father and only begotten God, though being incapable of suffering according to his own nature, suffered in his own flesh for our sake, according to the Scriptures, and that he made his own the sufferings of his own flesh in his crucified body impassibly, for by the grace of God and for the sake of all he tasted death by nature he was life, and was himself the Resurrection.

...(19.1) If anyone does not confess that the Emmanuel is God in truth and because of this does not confess that the Holy Virgin is the Mother of God (for she bore according to the flesh the Word of God made flesh), let him be anathema.

2. If anyone does not confess that the Word of God the Father was united to flesh substantially and that there is one Christ with his own flesh and that he manifestly is God, the same one as is man, let him be anathema.

3. If anyone separates the *hypostaseis* in the one Christ after the union, joining them together only by a conjunction according to dignity, that is, by authority or power, and not rather by a combination that is according to a real union, let him be anathema.³

Council of Ephesus (431)

- Cyril instigated council of 431 in Ephesus (at Church of Mary)
- succeeded in condemning Nestorius at council
- canons (rules) of the council

Canon 2: If certain bishops of a province have abandoned the holy council and have gone over to apostasy or were trying to find ways of getting around the council or after having signed Nestorius' deposition, later on turned to the assembly of apostasy, those bishops following the judgment of the holy council, are completely separated from the priesthood and deprived of their rank.

Canon 4: If any clerics should apostatize and, in private or in public, dare to take the side of Nestorius' or Celstius' ideas, the holy council has thought it good and proper that they be deposed.

Canon 6: Similarly, if, in whatever manner, anyone should want to set aside what was done in each case at the holy council of Ephesus, the holy council has decided that if they are bishops or

³ ibid.

clerics, they should be completely deposed from their rank, and if they are laypersons, they should be excommunicated.⁴

- two kinds
 - dyophysites (Nestorian)
 - monophysites (Eutyches)
 - chalcedonian creed (middle position)
- Nestorian legacy
 - Syriac church was Nestorian
 - Persian Christians were Nestorian
 - Chinese Christians were Nestorian

Chalcedon (451)

- after Cyril's victory over Nestorius, Flavian took over as the bishop of Constantinople and excommunicated Eutyches for teaching, like Cyril, that Christ had only one nature.
- Dioscorus, the new bishop of Alexandria, tried to undo Flavian's condemnation and held a second Council of Ephesus in 449 (just 18 years later)
- Bart Ehrman: "In addition to theological argument, Dioscorus employed the physical intimidation of imperial troops on the more stubborn bishops. Flavian himself was beaten so severely that he died soon after the council deposed him. The brute force placed in the service of theological conformity later earned this synod the title "the Robber Council," and it did not enjoy ecumenical status."⁵
- Theodosius II died falling from a horse in 450
- Marcian, his general married the nun Pulcheria when she was 51
- They called for a council at Chalcedon, a suburb of Constantinople, to address the dual natures issue and undo what had happened at the Robber Council while reasserting the supremacy of Constantinople over Alexandria and Rome.
- 630 bishops in attendance
- Leo's Tome was accepted as orthodoxy (Leo was bishop of Rome from 440-461)
- Definition of Chalcedon:

[*After affirming the creeds of Nicaea and Constantinople:*] Therefore, following the holy fathers, all of us teach unanimously that everyone must confess that our Lord Jesus Christ is one single and same Son, who is perfect according to divinity and perfect according to humanity, truly God and truly man, composed of a reasonable soul and a body, consubstantial [ὁμοούσιος] with the Father according to divinity and consubstantial [ὁμοούσιος] with us according to humanity, completely like us except for sin; he was begotten by the Father before all ages according to his divinity and, in these latter days, he was born for us and for our salvation of Mary the Virgin, the Mother of God [θεοτόκος], according to his humanity; one single and same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, known in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the difference of natures is in no way suppressed by their union, but rather the properties of each are retained and united in one single person [πρόσωπον] and single hypostasis [ὑπόστασις]; he is neither separated nor divided in two persons, but he is a single

⁴ cited from *The Church of the Ancient Councils: The Disciplinary Work of the First Four Ecumenical Councils* trans. Peter L'Huilier (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press 1996), 154-164.

⁵ Bart D. Ehrman and Andrew S. Jacobs, *Christianity in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004), 262.

and same only-begotten Son, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, such as he was announced formerly by the prophets, such as he himself, the Lord Jesus Christ, taught us about himself and such as the symbol of the fathers has transmitted to us.

Canon 7: We have decided that those who have been admitted into the ranks of the clergy or who have become monks, from now on, must no longer take service in the army or accept any secular dignity; if they dare to do this and do not repent and return to the state that they previously chose for God, they will be excommunicated.

Canon 18: Since the crime of plotting and conspiring is repressed through all possible means by civil laws, even more so is it proper that it should be forbidden by the Church of God. If, therefore, any clerics or monks are found plotting and conspiring, or even thinking about such improper action against bishops or colleagues in the clergy, let them be completely deposed from their rank.⁶

- did not solve the problem of the dual natures
 - hugely controversial for many years
 - condemned monophysitism
- Nestorius, though condemned and banished, had no trouble accepting the Chalcedonian Creed
- never accepted by many Christian groups to this day
 - Orthodox church of Egypt
 - Orthodox church of Syria
 - Orthodox church of Armenia
 - Assyrian Church
- Hans von Campenhausen: "The fiction of an unbroken uniformity is in contradiction to the truth and had to be preserved by an ever-increasing expenditure of formalistic ingenuity. The effect of the Council of Chalcedon was particularly catastrophic in this respect. It meant a serious defeat for the Alexandrian theology which had triumphed twenty years previously at Ephesus. ...The earlier Fathers of the Church had all been, more or less, pure Platonists, and the doctrine of the Trinity had been originally conceived in Platonic-Neoplatonic terms. In the fifth and sixth centuries Aristotelian logic began to make its mark and was combined with the Neoplatonic traditions, inside and outside theology. Thus there came into being a terrifyingly complicated apparatus which, however, did not function according to its own laws but was twisted to suit the particular metaphysical and theological principles which it was intended to justify. The result of all these changes was Byzantine scholasticism, a scientific theology so heavily armoured that only the most learned specialists, monks, and clerics could find their way about. ...Theology lived its own life in constant reference to the past and lost all direct contact with the Bible and with life outside or different from itself."⁷

⁶ L'Huilier, pp. 184, 206-265.

⁷ von Campenhausen, 174-6.