

## Important Creeds and Councils of the Christian Church

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### Class IX: The Council of Chalcedon (451): The Humanity of Christ

#### Historical Christological Heresies

Taken from Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine by H. Wayne House, Zondervan Publishing

| Viewpoints of the:      | Arians  | Nestorians  | Eutychians   |
|-------------------------|---|---|--|
| <b>Proponents</b>       | Arius, Presbyter of Alexandria  | Represented by Nestorius, 5th-c. bishop of Constantinople   | Represented by Eutychius Theodosius II   |
| <b>Time</b>             | 4th century   | 5th century   | 5th century  |
| <b>Denial</b>           | Genuine deity   | Unity of the Person of Christ (denied the organic union of natures)   | Distinction of the Natures of Christ (denied distinction of natures)                                     |
| <b>Explanation</b>      | Christ was the first and highest created being, homoiousia, not homoousia.  | Union was moral, not organic- thus two persons. The human was completely controlled by the divine           | Monophysitist; the human nature was swallowed by the divine to create a new third nature- a tertium quid |
| <b>Condemned</b>        | Council of Nicea (325)  | Synod of Ephesus (431)  | Council of Chalcedon (451)   |
| <b>Associated with</b>  | Generation= creation  | "Word-flesh" not "word-man" Christology; opposed to using theotokos of Mary                                 | Concern for the unity and divinity of Christ (minimized humanity)  |
| <b>Argument for</b>     | They teach that Christ is subordinate to the Father   | Distinguished human Jesus, who died, from Divine Son, who cannot die  | Maintained the unity of Christ's person  |
| <b>Argument against</b> | Only a divine Christ is worthy of worship; this view tends toward polytheism. Only a divine Christ can save (Phil. 2:6; Rev. 1:8) | If the death of Jesus was the act of a human person, not of God, it could not be efficacious (Rev. 1:12-18) | If Christ were neither a man nor God, he could not redeem as man or as God (Phil. 2:6)                   |
| <b>Major Opponents</b>  | Athanasius  | Cyril of Alexandria   | Flavian of Constantinople<br>Pope Leo<br>Theodoret   |

#### The Nestorian Controversy

Nestorius was originally a monk, then presbyter in Antioch, and after 428 patriarch of Constantinople. He was considered an honest man, of great eloquence, monastic piety, and the spirit of a zealot for orthodoxy. In his inaugural sermon he said: "Give me, O emperor (addressing Theodosius II), the earth purified of heretics, and I will give thee heaven for it; help me to fight the heretics, and I will help thee to fight the Persians." As patriarch, he incited the emperor to enact stringent laws against heretics. He was opposed to the expression *Theotokos* or "mother of God", which had been applied to the virgin Mary by Origen, Alexander of Alexandria, Athanasius and others which passed into the devotional language of the people.

Nestorius said that he could call Mary *Cristotokos* or "the bearer of Christ," but not the "mother of God." He said in his sermon, "You ask whether Mary may be called mother of God. Has God then a mother? If so, heathenism itself is excusable in assigning mothers to its gods; but then Paul is a liar, for he said of the deity of Christ that it was without Father, without mother, and without descent" (Heb. 7:3). He went on to write: "Christ was formed in the womb of Mary, was not himself God, but God assumed him (after his baptism), and on account of Him who assumed, he who was assumed is also called God." Nestorius asserted rightly the duality of the natures, and the continued distinction between them; he denied that God, as such, could either be born, or suffer and die; but he pressed the

distinction of the two natures to a double personality. Instead of theanthropos, or a God-Man, he makes Christ merely a God-bearing man. The teachings of Nestorius were condemned by the Council of Ephesus (431).

The confessions of the Council of Ephesus, composed by Theodoret say:

"Our Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, is perfect God and perfect man, of a reasonable soul and body subsisting; as to his manhood, born of the Virgin Mary... of the same essence with the Father as to his Godhead, and of the same substance with us as to his manhood; for two natures are united with one another. Therefore we confess ONE Christ, ONE Lord, and ONE Son. By reason of this union, which yet is without confusion, we also confess that the holy Virgin is mother of God, because God the Logos was made flesh and man, and united with himself the temple [humanity] even from the conception; which temple he took from the Virgin."

### **The Eutychian Controversy/ The Council of Robbers (449)**

The error of Eutychianism or Monophysitism (mono= one; physis=nature), urged the personal unity of Christ at the expense of the distinction of natures, and made the divine Logos absorb the human nature. The problem was that if Christ is not true man, he cannot be our example, and his passion and death dissolve at last into mere figurative representations or docetic show (docetism: dokein- to appear). Eutyches (the fortunate. His opponents said he should have been Atyches (the unfortunate), was presbyter and head of a cloister of three hundred monks in Constantinople. He had recently appeared at the Council of Ephesus to argue against the teachings of Nestorius in 431.

He taught that the impersonal human nature is assimilated and, as it were, deified by the personal Logos, so that his body is by no means of the same substance (homousion) with ours, but a divine body. All human attributes are transferred to the one subject, the humanized Logos. So it can be said: God is born, God suffered, God was crucified and died. The synod of Ephesus met in 449, and consisted of 135 bishops. It was called by the Emperor Theodosius II because of a patriarch of Alexandria named Dioscurus. It has been called the "Council of Robbers" because the council affirmed the orthodoxy and sanctity of Eutyches and condemned dyophysitism (dyo=two; physis=natures/ dual natures of Christ) as a heresy (this was the orthodox teaching of the West since the time of Tertullian), and deposed and excommunicated Theodoret, Flavian (who died shortly thereafter because of violence at the council) and Leo.

The ancient alliance between Rome and Alexandria was ripped apart because of this, and Leo denounced the council as a "synod of robbers." Theodosius supported Dioscurus but died the following year. The new emperor had good relations with Leo in the West and the Pope called a new council to meet in the following year. The place was to be at Chalcedon, opposite Constantinople, and there 600 bishops assembled at the Fourth Ecumenical Council. The so-called Council of Ephesus 449, was rejected. Dioscurus was deposed and sent into exile by the emperor.

### **The Creed of Chalcedon: October 22, 451**

"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 Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable soul and body; consubstantial (homousion) with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God (theotokos), according to the manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation, the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature preserved, and concurring in one person (prosopon) and one subsistence (hypostasis), 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 Christ Himself has taught us, and the creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us."

## **The Aftermath of the Council of Chalcedon**

The creed produced has been regarded by the Greek, Latin and most Protestant churches as the "orthodox" solution of the Christological problem.

The creed established a norm of doctrine in a field in which there had been great confusion. It was true to the fundamental conviction of the church that in Christ a complete revelation of God is made in terms of a genuine human life.

It secured a great dogmatic victory for Rome, the imperial authority was determined that the victory should not be one of Roman jurisdiction. Alexandria was crippled permanently.

Jerusalem, Constantinople, and Antioch received the level of Rome as head of the Christian Church.

The Creed of Chalcedon was now the official standard of the empire.

As the Nicene doctrine of the Trinity stands midway between Tritheism and Sabellianism, so the Chalcedonian formula strikes the true mean between Nestorianism and Eutychianism.

Next Class: The Council of Chalcedon II: The Biblical References