

The Christological Controversies

I. The Question Debated

A. Nature of Christ's Humanity

1. Fourth century: Focus on Christ's deity, little discussion of His humanity
2. Christ's person argued in terms of salvation
3. Key Terms
 - a. Person (*hypostasis*)
 - b. Nature (*physis*)

B. Alexandrian vs. Antiochian Schools

Alexandria

Philosophical/Theological
Allegorical interpretation
Word-flesh incarnation
Unity of Christ's person

Antioch

Historical
Grammatical-historical interpretation
Word-man incarnation
Distinction of Christ's two natures

1. Arius combined worst aspects of both schools
2. Pelagius accepted by Antioch because of human role in salvation

C. Apollinarianism

1. Early challenge on Christ's person/humanity
2. Contemporary with Arian controversy
3. "Trichotomous heresy" of Apollinaris, bishop of Laodicea
4. Christ neither wholly God nor wholly man
5. Condemned by Council of Constantinople

II. Nestorian Controversy

A. Sides

1. Nestorius
 - a. Archbishop of Constantinople (428-31)
 - b. Accusation: Separated the natures of Christ almost to make Him two persons
 - 1) A "God-bearing man" instead of a "God-man"
 - 2) A form of adoptionism
 - c. *Theotokos* vs. *Christotokos*
 - 1) Nestorius called Mary *Christotokos*, or "Christ-bearer"
 - 2) Rejected traditional *Theotokos*, "God-bearer," or "mother of God"
 - a) On one hand, an affirmation of full deity
 - b) On other hand, danger of "Mariolatry"
 - 3) He was not a "pre-Protestant"
 - d. Was Nestorius really Nestorian?
2. Orthodox
 - a. Theological Terminology
 - 1) *Hypostatic union*: two natures united in one person
 - 2) *Communicatio idiomatum* ("communication of attributes")
 - a) One nature does not borrow attributes from the other
 - b) The person possesses the attributes of both natures
 - b. Christ's humanity challenged Alexandrians
 - 1) Christ was fully human, *developing* as a human being
 - 2) Christ's struggle in Gethsemane difficult for Alexandrians

B. Council of Ephesus (431)

1. **Third ecumenical council.**
2. Political chicanery resulting in condemnation of Nestorius
3. Results
 - a. As Schaff says, its results are more negative than positive
 - b. Condemned Nestorianism
 - c. Also condemned Pelagianism.
 - d. Marked a split between the churches of the west and the Church of the East (Assyrian Church, Nestorian Church)
 - e. Issued no creed

III. Eutychian Controversy

A. Leading Figures

1. Abbot Eutyches from Egypt
 - a. Christ's human nature is absorbed into His divine
 - b. "Two natures before the union; one nature after the union"
2. Pope Leo I
 - a. Bishop of Rome (440-61); led the orthodox side
 - b. Wrote *Tome* ("Letter to Flavian"), a major statement of orthodoxy on person of Christ

B. "Robber's Synod"

1. *Not* an ecumenical council
2. Eutychians used violence & intimidation at a synod in Ephesus
 - a. Leo I called it a "robber's synod"
 - b. Eutychians alienated both Constantinople *and* Rome
3. Challenge: Unworthy Representatives of Orthodoxy
 - a. Offensive politics, personalities, & even violence
 - b. Christian Response
 - 1) Recognize God's sovereignty over man's evil
 - 2) Judge the results by Scripture, not the "spirituality" of major figures

C. Council of Chalcedon (451)

1. **Fourth ecumenical council.**
2. Condemned Eutychianism and issued Formula of Chalcedone defining the person of Christ
 - a. A true incarnation of the Logos
 - b. A precise distinction between nature and person
 - c. Incarnation results in the "God-man" (fully divine, fully human)
 - d. Duality of the natures
 - e. Unity of the person: hypostatic union
 - f. That the whole work of Christ is to be attributed to His person and not to one or the other nature exclusively
 - g. Impersonality of the human nature of Christ (i.e., Christ's human nature had no independent personality of its own)
3. Ramifications
 - a. Cf. Anthony Meredith's terminology, in Christ, there are two "whats" in one "who"
 - b. Four "fences" of Chalcedon on Christ's nature
 - 1) "Without confusion; without change; without division; without separation"

- 2) Doctrine of the hypostatic union balanced these four and became the tests of orthodox Christology
 4. Marks the division w/ the Monophysite (“Non-Chalcedonian”) churches
- IV. Monophysite Controversy
- A. Monophysitism
 1. Belief that Christ had but one nature of Christ
 - a. Against Eutyches, says that His body was human.
 - b. Against Eutyches, they thought both natures contributed to the one nature.
 2. Monophysite churches: Coptic Church, Ethiopian Church, Jacobite (Syrian), Armenian
 3. Charges against Monophysitism
 - a. That Christ’s nature becomes a *tertium quid* (“third something”)
 - b. Loss of true humanity
 - B. Council of Constantinople II (553)
 1. **Fifth ecumenical council.**
 2. Leading figures: Emperor Justinian (527-565) & Empress Theodora → Appease Monophysites to maintain unity
 3. Acts of the Council
 - a. Condemned some anti-Monophysite writings
 - b. Condemned Origen
 - c. Upheld the Council of Chalcedon
 - d. Declared Mary *Theotokos* and “ever-virgin”
- V. Monothelite Controversy
- A. Question debated
 1. Monothelitism: Belief that Christ had but one will—vain attempt at compromise
 2. The debate was over whether “will” was part of “nature” or “person.”
 3. Berkhof’s explanation
 - a. *Will* in the ancient church meant more than volition, self-determination, and choice
 - b. Also included “appetites, instincts, desires, and affections”
 4. Pope Honorius supported Monothelitism, which posed a problem for the Church of Rome after it was declared as a heresy.
 - B. Council of Constantinople III (680-81)
 1. **Sixth ecumenical council**
 2. Condemned Monothelitism, saying that it was essential that a true nature have its own will
 3. After over 200 years of conflict, the church ended up at what the Council of Chalcedon said
 4. Muslim conquest ended the Monophysite controversies

Final Note: Be aware of the Council of Nicea II (787), the **seventh ecumenical council**, which vindicated icons & images