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The Mystery of the Incarnation: Towards a Reconciliation of Cyril and Nestorius

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Towards a Reconciliation of Cyril and Nestorius

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Abbreviations

ACO	*Acta Conciliorum Oenumenicorum*, ed. E. Schwartz, Berlin
CH	*Church History*, American Society of Church History
JES	*Journal of Ecumenical Studies*
JETS	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*, Oxford
LFC	*A Library of the Fathers of the Catholic Church*, ed. E. Pusey
NPNF	*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace
PGL	*Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Geoffrey W.H. Lampe, Oxford
PG	*Patrologia Graeca*, J.P. Minge
TS	*Theological Studies*

Abstract

This thesis studies the fifth-century christological controversy surrounding Cyril of Alexandria (c. 378-444) and Nestorius of Constantinople (c. 381-451) and their debate around the person and nature of Jesus Christ, sparked by the *theotokos* dispute. At the First Council of Ephesus (431) the christologies of these two bishops and theologians were pitted against each other, and have since been studied in contrast to one another. The goal of this study is to examine the christologies of Cyril and Nestorius with the intention to seek reconciliation between the two. In the Introduction I first orient the reader to the problem and issues at stake, then examine issues of source material used, and finally I define the sources which formulated the christologies of Cyril and Nestorius. Chapter One begins the effort to determine the roots each theologian's christology by examining the hermeneutical, soteriological, and philosophical underpinnings of their respective "schools" of Alexandria and Antioch. In Chapter Two I carefully develop the core christology of Cyril and Nestorius, highlighting their major features and points of contention. In Chapter Three I begin the move towards reconciling the two diverging christologies by noting the strengths and weaknesses of each, as well as points of agreement, finally setting each as the "edges" of an orthodox description of the Incarnation. In the Conclusion I summarize my thesis statement, while noting areas to improve this study and needs of further contribution to the field of Cyrilline and Nestorian studies.

Introduction

In the early months of 429, Nestorius of Constantinople preached a series of sermons against attributing the title *theotokos* ("Bearer of God") to Christ, an act which sparked one of the greatest controversies in the history of the Church. What began as an effort of simple terminological correction compounded into an all-out theological battle over the person and nature of Jesus Christ. To many, the rejection of this term as applied to Christ had unfavored ecclesial and soteriological consequences. Cyril of Alexandria, bishop of a rival See, took up the theological mantle against Nestorius. Cyril is known by scholars for being as brilliant as he was controversial. Controversy and misunderstandings gnawed at him for most of his life, but this did not stop him from becoming one of the most influential theologians in the fifth century.

The central issue to this christological controversy was the union of the divine and human natures in Christ at the Incarnation. Error in such a doctrine had many consequences, primarily soteriological and ecclesial. Both theologians proposed their own understandings of the Incarnation, but history claimed only one as the victor. The results of this quarrel caused a serious tear in the fabric of the early Church. The fragility of the controversy must be matched in the care by which one studies Cyril and Nestorius and their writings. The conflict cannot be reduced to a mere difference in personalities, or even to the complexities of ecclesial and imperial politics, though these factors are important.[1] This paper seeks to bring careful study to the christological work of Cyril and Nestorius to determine the causes of their disparity, all the while seeking to understand their christologies on their own terms.

[1] John McGuckin, *St. Cyril and the Christological Controversy* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Press, 2004) 21.

Most scholarship on Cyril and Nestorius has been comparative, studying their works in opposition to one another. This study acknowledges those efforts while striving to take a step away from opposition towards a reconciliation of their christologies. This study will demonstrate that the discrepancies between Cyril and Nestorius were primarily due to two factors: 1) differing approaches from their respective schools; and 2) the inability and unwillingness to understand each other due to a confusion of terms, biblical texts, and metaphors. Many aspects of this great debate contributed to these factors, but due to the scope of this study not all will be considered, such as the political and social influences at work, and the ecclesial history surrounding the legacies of Cyril and Nestorius. While some conclusions will be offered, this thesis primarily functions as a prolegomenon for future work. Finally, considering those discrepancies, I will demonstrate how a movement towards a partial reconciliation between Cyril and Nestorius is not only possible, but also beneficial to the study of christology.

Literature Review

The Christological controversy at Ephesus and leading up to Chalcedon is one of the most studied topics in Patristic studies, providing rich soil from which scholars continue to produce contributions to the works of Cyril and Nestorius. Two notable works provide a foundational study of this history: Pelikan's first volume of *The Christian Tradition* and Grillmeier's first volume of *Christ in Christian Tradition*.[2] The vast writings on Cyril and Nestorius depict each in good light and bad, but tradition demonstrates that Cyril won the day at Ephesus and was later confirmed at Chalcedon, while Nestorius was defeated.[3] This trend is

[2] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 1, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971); Alios Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

[3] This statement is reductionistic. Realistically there was great controversy which continued long after Chalcedon. But most historians recognize that Cyril was the victor and Nestorius was not. For more on the

characteristically seen in the subtitle of Susan Wessel's *Cyril of Alexandria and the Nestorian Controversy: The Making of a Saint and a Heretic*, where she argues this point from a cultural and historical perspective.[4] The purpose of this paper is to converse with the respective theologians of the fifth century and with modern scholarship, to determine the extent to which the two disagreed and what caused their disagreements, and to make an attempt towards reconciling the two positions.

However, two particular research issues have made this study problematic for me. The first is that while Cyril has produced a large corpus, many of his works have yet to be translated into English.[5] The bulk of Cyril's primary source material is indebted to P. E. Pusey's Latin translations, included in the edited work of E. Schwartz *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*, while the Greek versions of Cyril's writings fills 10 volumes (68-77) of J. P. Minge's *Patrologia Graeca*. Nevertheless, Cyril's major works relating to the Christological controversies (or at least portions of them) have been translated into English. One of the first efforts came from Richard Norris in *The Christological Controversy*, in which he translated some of the works from Cyril and Nestorius most relevant to the Council of Ephesus, such as Nestorius' *First Sermon* against *theotokos* and Cyril's *Second Letter* to Nestorius. Other most notable efforts would be John A. McGuckin's thorough work *St. Cyril of Alexandria and the Christological Controversy* as well

controversial nature of this debate and its legacy, see the introductions of Richard Norris, *The Christological Controversy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980); John McGuckin, *The Christological Controversy*; Susan Wessel, *Cyril of Alexandria and the Nestorian Controversy* (Oxford: University Press, 2004).

[4] Wessel, *Cyril of Alexandria*, vii.

[5] Since I am a non-specialist in the Latin, Syriac, and Greek languages I am limited in being reliant upon the English translations.

as his short translation of *On the Unity of Christ*.[6] Norman Russell, in *Cyril of Alexandria*, sought to expand upon McGuckin's first edition by translating some of Cyril's other works, especially portions of his Commentaries on John and Isaiah. A final source for relevant primary source material comes from John McEnerney's two-volume set of letters from Cyril and other parties during the time of christological conflict.[7]

The second issue involves the lack of primary sources from Nestorius, which has been problematic as scholars attempt to reconstruct Nestorius' christology in his own words, rather than through the writings of Cyril. After his condemnation, many of Nestorius' writings were destroyed; however, some works and fragments were safeguarded and hidden by the Syrian tradition. The only document that truly expresses his early thought around the conflict was his *First Sermon*. Several fragments of Nestorius' works were reassembled by F. Loofs in his *Nestoriana* (1905), but it was not until the late 19th century that Nestorius' *The Bazaar of Heraclides* was discovered and translated into French by F. Nau, in *Le Livre de Heraclide de Damas* (1910).[8] This work was later translated into English by G. R. Driver and L. Hodgson (1925). It is a shame that Nestorius' works were so quickly destroyed in the fifth-century, and that modern scholarship has neglected him until recently. The heretical stigma continues to haunt Nestorius, despite recent attempts by modern scholars to revitalize and rehabilitate his muddied name and christology.[9]

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[6] For an expanded bibliography on Cyrilline and Antiochene Studies, see McGuckin's "Study Bibliographies" in his *St. Cyril of Alexandria and the Christological Controversy*.

[7] John McEnerney, *St. Cyril of Alexandria: Letters 1-50* and *Letters 51-110*, in *The Fathers of the Church*, vols. 76 and 77 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1987).

[8] "Bazaar" is sometimes rendered as "Book" which is a more accurate translation; F. Nau, *Le Livre de Heraclide de Damas* (Paris: Letouzey et ané, 1910).

[9] On the modern revival of Nestorian christology, see Carl Braaten, "Modern Interpretations of Nestorius," *CH* 32, no. 3 (1963): 251-267; Richard Kyle, "Nestorius: The Partial Rehabilitation of a Heretic," *JETS* 32, no. 1

Scholars continue the work of meticulously dissecting and reconstructing these fifth-century christologies. Some works have attempted to rehabilitate the character and work of the respective early theologians, while others maintain the nuances which irreconcilably exclude the other. Thomas Weinandy and Daniel Keating have edited a work to demonstrate Cyril as a broadly erudite theologian beyond his christology.[10] Susan Wessels uncovers the political and rhetorical aspects of the debate in her monograph. In the last few decades, scholars continue to hone in on singular aspects of the conflict, such as the role of immutability and impassibility, the use of imagery, or the historical influences of the controversy.

Sources of Christology: Cyril and Nestorius

Three aspects formed the foundation of Cyril and Nestorius' christologies: 1) the key biblical texts they chose; 2) the biblical imagery and metaphors that shaped their christology; and 3) the metaphysical terminology they used to describe the Incarnation. Choosing different starting points in these foundational aspects led to divergence and misunderstandings in their christologies as Cyril and Nestorius interacted with one another through their competing schools of Alexandria and Antioch. Modern scholarship has recognized all three of these categories as aspects of their divergence, but, according to John O'Keefe, most efforts overemphasize the role that terminology played in the debate. Instead he argues that "the conflict emerges when the scriptural narrative collides with certain philosophical presuppositions about God."[11] Understanding the foundational texts, metaphors, and terminology is crucial for grasping the

(March 1989): 73-83; Milton Anastos, "Nestorius Was Orthodox," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 16, vol. 16 (1962): 117-140; Roberta Chesnut, "Two Prosopa in Nestorius' *Bazaar of Heracleides*," *JTS* 24, no. 2 (1978): 392-409.

[10] Thomas Weinandy and Daniel Keating, *The Theology of St. Cyril of Antioch: A Critical Appreciation* (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2003).

[11] John O'Keefe, "Impassible Suffering? Divine Passion and Fifth-Century Christology," *TS* 58 (1997): 41.

nuances of each position. It is an easy task to see *how* Cyril and Nestorius described the Incarnation differently, but it is increasingly difficult to understand *why*, and to work towards reconciliation. In this work I will attempt to incorporate each of the three categories—how they influenced their respective christologies and how they created conflict that in their day was irreconcilable.

Scholars identify three texts of Scripture which provide the primary source of Cyril's christology: John 1:14, Philippians 2:5-11, and Hebrews 2:14-17.[12] In his *Commentary on John*, Cyril draws extensively on the phrase "the Word became flesh." Keating describes Cyril's understanding of this passage as "Christ simply *is* the eternal Word now made flesh for our sake."[13] Both O'Keefe and Wickham propose that Cyril used the Hebrews passage to expand upon his argument from John, contending that the divine Logos is the single subject of the Incarnation.[14] However, the text which most powerfully drove Cyril's christology was the second chapter of Philippians. Cyril draws upon the language of self-emptying and "taking the form of a man" in Philippians to demonstrate the soteriological function of the Incarnation "in order to restore that nature from the effects of Adam's sin and raise it to participation in God himself."[15] These three texts form the *locus* of Cyril's Christology.

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[12] So O'Keefe, "Impassible Suffering," 46; Daniel Keating, "Cyril of Alexandria (c. 378-444) and Nestorius of Constantinople (c. 381-451)," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Theologians*, ed. Ian S. Markham (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 84; Lars Koen, *Saving Passion: Incarnational and Soteriological Thought in Cyril of Alexandria's Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John* (Stockholm, Sweden: Uppsala, 1991) 21; Keating and Koen do not include the Hebrews passage.

[13] Keating, "Cyril and Nestorius," 84.

[14] O'Keefe, "Impassible Suffering," 47; Lionel Wickham, *Cyril of Alexandria: Select Letters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983) 30.

[15] Keating, "Cyril and Nestorius," 84.

It is more difficult to find the scriptural *locus* in Nestorius' christology.[16] The next chapter will demonstrate that the primary exegete of the Antiochene tradition was Theodore of Mopsuestia, who greatly influenced Nestorius. While Nestorius also looked to Philippians 2 for his christology, he gravitated more towards the phrase "form of a servant," unlike Cyril. Nestorius relies on this phrase to demonstrate the *prosopon* of humanity, which will be described in more detail in Chapter 3, yet his exegesis on that text does more to describe his christology than his exegetical foundation.[17] However, a case can be made that the primary source of Scripture for Nestorius' view of the Incarnation was the Epistle to the Hebrews. J. F. Bethune-Baker offers a lengthy discussion of one of the few sermons we have from Nestorius, demonstrating that the Epistle highly influenced his understanding of the Incarnation, particularly regarding Christ's role as High Priest.[18] In addition, Cyril contends with Nestorius on multiple occasions in Book Three of his *Against Nestorius* over the correct interpretations of Hebrews regarding the Incarnation. A final text of great importance to Nestorius is John 2:19, which was influential in Nestorius' biblical imagery for the Incarnation. Overall, a major attempt to reconstruct Nestorius' theological *locus* is needed, if such a task is possible.

Not only did these biblical texts shape their christology, they shaped the biblical metaphors and images each used to describe their christology. Cyril drew many of his Incarnational metaphors from OT Scriptures, but his primary metaphor, the soul and body, was

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[16] This view is also supported by Frederick McLeod, *The Image of God in the Antiochene Tradition* (Washington, D.C., The Catholic University of America Press, 1999) 39. McLeod correctly argues that the few writings we have belonging to Nestorius are apologetic in nature, thus they do not lend themselves to understanding his exegetical method.

[17] See Nestorius' exposition of Phil. 2 in Nestorius, *The Bazaar of Heracleides*, 166-67.

[18] J. F. Bethune-Baker, *Nestorius and His Teaching*: *A Fresh Examination of the Evidence* (Cambridge: University Press, 1908) 114-115.

more metaphysical.[19] The two best expressions of this metaphor are found in his Second Book on *Against Nestorius* and in his *Scholia on the Incarnation*. In the latter Cyril draws on the work of Origen, elucidating that soul and body are distinct, but when the soul is joined to the body they become one and are indistinguishable, yet still different.[20] Whatever the body experiences, so does the soul, and vice versa. This will become quite significant in Cyril's description of the hypostatic union, and the *communicatio idiomatum*. McGuckin summarizes how this metaphor informs Cyril's christology: "This discrete existence of a spiritual reality (soul) and a physical reality (body or flesh) was never compromised in the union of the two that constituted a human being (an embodied soul), for even in the union the two realities existed discreetly."[21]

The primary metaphor Nestorius used to describe the Incarnation was the Temple. He employs this biblical imagery in his *First Sermon* again *theotokos* and in his *Second Letter* to Cyril.[22] In the former, Nestorius writes, "Am I the only one who calls Christ 'twofold'? Does he not call himself both a destroyable temple and God who raises it up? And if it was God who was destroyed … the Lord would have said, 'Destroy this *God* and in three days I will raise him up.'" Notice that as Nestorius draws from John 2:19 he distinguishes between the Temple and God, and he will invoke this imagery to argue for the distinguishability of the human and divine natures while also arguing for their union. He does this by drawing on the imagery of the High Priest (Logos), who dwells inside of the Temple (human being). Using this imagery, Nestorius

[19] Steven McKinion, *Words, Imagery, and the Mystery of Christ: A Reconstruction of Cyril of Alexandria's Christology*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae, vol. 55 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2000) 21-23.

[20] Cyril, *Scholia on the Incarnation*, 8. Found in Pusey, *LFC*, vol. 47, 192.

[21] McGuckin, *The Christological Controversy*, 199.

[22] For the English translations of both, see Norris, *The Christological Controversy*, 129 and 137.

often describes the incarnation as an intimate indwelling of the Logos and the body with a moral agenda, which accentuates their union while also creating a distinction between the two.

Since the two theologians used different metaphors and biblical imagery to describe the Incarnation, it follows that those metaphors would shape the terms they used to describe the Incarnation. For now, it is enough to introduce two sets of competing terms used by Cyril and Nestorius: 1) *henosis* and *synapheia*; 2) *hypostasis* and *prosopon*.[23] To describe the union of the natures Cyril used the term *henosis* or "union" of natures, which he borrowed from Gregory Nazianzen. In contrast, Nestorius favored the term *synapheia* or "conjunction" of natures. The difference is best described in how intimate the natures became in creating a new reality. This first set of terms demonstrate *how* each nature functioned in relation to one another, and the second set of terms describe *where* this union took place metaphysically. Cyril described the union in terms of a "hypostatic union" or a union of the divine and human *hypostases*. This term relates to the concrete reality or underlying essence of thing.[24] Again, Nestorius strategically chose a different term for the location of the union, which he described as a "prosopic union," or a union of the divine and human *prosopa*. This term literally means "face" but for Nestorius it represented the observable reality and manifestation of a thing (as opposed to the underlying essence of a thing [*hypostasis*]). These terminological differences demonstrate the distinctiveness in the way Cyril and Nestorius thought and spoke about the Incarnation.

The study above describes the internal sources of Cyril and Nestorius' christologies, but both clearly stood on the shoulders of their predecessors. Chapter One will demonstrate how

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[23] For the usage and history of these terms, see *PGL*: *henosis*, 479-480; *synapheia*, 1308-1310; *hypostasis*, 1454-1460; *prosopon*, 1186-1189. For a wider readability and the sake of uniformity I have chosen to transliterate all foreign words into English.

[24] McGuckin has an excellent introduction of how these terms were used by Cyril and Nestorius. See especially *The Christological Controversy*, 138. Some definitions in this paragraph are his.

their respective schools contributed to the formation of their christologies. It is also clear these influences led to several divergences which culminated in the heated controversy at Ephesus and the aftermath leading to Chalcedon. These specific disagreements will come to light in their christologies which will be fully developed in Chapter Two. However, after recognizing their influences and fleshing out their christological tensions, in Chapter Three I hope to demonstrate an effort towards the reconciliation of their two christologies, rather than simply add to the scholarly majority that their unity is beyond saving. While a clear divergence will be demonstrated in this work, as has been seen historically in the study of Cyril and Nestorius, this thesis also attempts to move beyond their discrepancies and work towards at least a partial reconciliation of the two theologians. As their theological foundations and own christologies comes to light, one can begin to see that partial reconciliation is possible, when each theologian is seen as creating the "edges" of an orthodox understanding of the Incarnation; Nestorius, on his own terms, representing one edges, and Cyril representing the other.

Chapter One

The Polarizing Approaches of Alexandria and Antioch

The discrepancies in the christologies of Cyril and Nestorius are exemplified by the histories of their respective schools at Alexandria and Antioch.[1] The foundational assumptions of biblical hermeneutics, philosophy, and soteriology influenced the approaches of each school and in turn shaped the theologians who trained there. These approaches led to a divergence in their christologies, which came to a head in the works of Cyril and Nestorius, as each school competed for the favor of Constantinople. One cannot properly understand Cyril and Nestorius without grasping the ramifications of the influences which their respective schools had on their work. This chapter will explore a few of the major divergences between the schools and how these approaches converged in the christological controversies of the fifth-century.

Hermeneutics

Four figures formed the central "school of thought" in Antioch: Andrew Samosata who was later deemed a heretic, Theodore of Mopsuestia, John of Antioch, and Theodoret of Cyr.[2] Nestorius was a contemporary with the latter two and fit well within their thought, but his infamous exile diminished his influence on the school. The Antiochene approach to biblical hermeneutics was epitomized by the literal-historical work of Theodore of Mopsuestia, who as Nestorius' teacher greatly influenced his christology.[3] The influence of Theodore's hermeneutic

[1] The polarity of these two schools has been succinctly described by Roger Olson in *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 201-210. See also R.V. Sellers, *Two Ancient Christologies* (London: SPCK, 1954).

[2] Keating, "Cyril and Nestorius," 87.

[3] Frederick McLeod, "Theodore of Mopsuestia Revisited," *TS* 61, no. 3 (Sept 2000): 451.

(and that of other Antiochenes) should not be overlooked, because his exegetical approach influenced his christological thought, and vice versa. Rowan Greer, a scholar who has done notable work in Antiochene and Nestorian studies, concludes that he "repeatedly found his [Theodore's] theology proceeding from Scripture and his exegesis motivated by a theological purpose."[4] As a result Theodore would rely upon Scripture to supply and define his theological terminology, and this grammatical method was directly applied to his Christology. For example, McLeod contends: "Theodore prefers to describe Christ's Incarnation as being a graced 'indwelling' of 'good pleasure' that justifies Christ being called the true 'Son of God,' 'Lord,' and 'image of God.' Even his favored term for Christ's person, *prosopon* is found in the New Testament."[5] This last observation of the word *prosopon* will be critical in the christological debate between Nestorius and Cyril.

Another concrete example of the Antiochene hermeneutic comes from the Gospel of John.[6] R.V. Sellers demonstrates this school's hermeneutic in Theodore's reaction against the Alexandrine treatment of the Greek verb *egeneto*, which proposed that the Logos "became" flesh "in the sense that He was 'changed into' man."[7] While Cyril surely did not mean a change which would corrupt God's immutability, both Theodore and Nestorius pushed against that language because of what it seemed to imply. However, this example demonstrates the importance of terminological and exegetical accuracy within the Antiochene tradition. This literal-historical

[4] Rowan Greer, *Theodore of Mopsuestia: Exegete and Theologian* (Westminster: London Faith Press, 1961) 151.

[5] Frederick McLeod, "Theodore Revisited," 451. Cf. especially Luke 9:51-3.

[6] For a thorough treatment of Theodore's christology and understanding of relevant terms through the Gospel of John, see Frederick McLeod, "The Christology in Theodore of Mopsuestia's *Commentary on the Gospel of John*," *Theological Studies* 73 (2012): 115-138.

[7] R.V. Sellers, *Two Ancient Christologies* (London: SPCK, 1954), 144.

approach was also true of Nestorius' who "presented his christological views by carefully explicating the biblical text" as he wrestled with Cyril.[8]

Terminological accuracy shaped Nestorius' reading of Scripture, which he often used to critique Cyril. Notice Nestorius' treatment of a key text in Philippians 2:

> Paul, however, recounts all at once everything which happened, that the [divine] being has become incarnate and that the immutability of the incarnate deity is always maintained after the union. That is why, as he writes, he cries out, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God . . . emptied himself, taking the form of a slave" [Phil. 2:5-7]. He did not say, "Let this mind be in you which was in God the Logos, who being in the form of God, took the form of a slave." Rather, he takes the term *Christ* to be an expression which signifies the two natures, and without risk he applies to him both the style "form of a slave," which he took, and that of God. The descriptions are different from each other by reason of the mysterious fact that the natures are two in number.[9]

Nestorius observes Paul distinguishing between Christ Jesus as the Incarnate Lord, and God the Logos as transcendent (purely divine). The difference may seem subtle, but not to Nestorius, who considers this distinction between Christ and the Logos to be substantial. Thus, the Incarnation is a union of two natures in *Christ*, the divine "form of God" and the human "form of a slave." In this reading, Christ Jesus represents the product of the union of two natures, divine and human. To Nestorius, Christ is the subject of the Incarnation, rather than the Logos, as Cyril would argue. Nestorius demonstrates a literal reading of this passage and believes this technical distinction to be vital in understanding the Incarnation.

In contrast, the Alexandrine approach to hermeneutics was characteristically allegorical, primarily influenced by the work of Origen. One example of this approach to biblical

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[8] Susan Wessel, *Cyril of Alexandria and the Nestorian Controversy: The Making of a Saint and a Heretic* (Oxford: University Press, 2004), 236. Wessel also compares the rhetorical styles of Nestorius and Cyril, the latter being much more pejorative and condescending than the former.

[9] Nestorius, *First Sermon Against the* Theotokos, in Norris, *The Christological Controversy*, 125-126.

interpretation, which is found as far back as Irenaeus in the late second century, was their tendency to discover hidden references to Christ throughout the Old Testament.[10] Robert Wilken describes this tendency in Cyril's *Commentary on Isaiah*:

> How can one speak of a sumptuous feast for 'all peoples, a feast of wine' (25:6) and not bring to mind the Holy Eucharist? . . . On the basis of a few verses from an oracle of the prophet Isaiah Cyril establishes a link between the ancient prophecy and the Incarnation of the divine Logos . . . The way [Cyril] goes about his task is characteristic of early Christian exegesis.[11]

Wilken goes on to say that the "subject of Cyril's exegesis is never simply the text that is before him, it is always the mystery of Christ."[12] The Antiochene tradition would have grown weary of this, but for Cyril and the Alexandrine tradition this was a natural approach.

After hearing reports of Nestorius' *First Sermon*, Cyril enters into the controversy by writing his first letter entitled *Letter to the Monks of Egypt*. Notice Cyril's treatment of the same text examined above with Nestorius:

> Who is it, then, who is 'in the form of God' and who 'did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped'? Or in what manner is he 'emptied out'? Or how did he descend to humiliation even in the 'form of a slave'? There are some who divide the One Lord Jesus Christ into two, that is into a man alongside the Word of God the Father. These people [Nestorius and companions] maintain that it was the one who came from the holy virgin who underwent the 'emptying out', and in this way they separate him and the Word of God. But if this is so, let them show how beforehand he could be conceived as being in the form and equality of the Father, in order that he could then undergo the manner of the self-emptying so as to establish himself in a state which he did not formerly enjoy? … How then could he be said to have been 'emptied out' if he was a man by nature, and was then born of a woman like us?[13]

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[10] Cf. Cyril's treatment of the "burning coal" in his *Commentary on Isaiah* 6:6-7, an image which he will develop extensively in his christology.

[11] Robert Wilken, "Cyril as Interpreter of the Old Testament," in *The Theology of St. Cyril of Alexandria: A Critical Appreciation*, eds. Thomas Weinandy and Daniel Keating (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 14.

[12] Wilken, "Cyril as Interpreter," 21. See also Keating, "Cyril and Nestorius," 81, where he describes Cyril's approach as "christocentric exegesis."

[13] Cyril of Alexandria, *Letter to the Monks of Egypt*, in McGuckin, *The Christological Controversy*, 252.

Observe that, like Nestorius, the question addressed is *who is the subject* of the Incarnation. However, Cyril does not reach the same conclusion as Nestorius from Paul's use of the title "Christ." Instead, he maintains that the Logos is the subject of the Incarnation, for only the Logos could be "in the form of God," "empty himself," or take on a form which he did not already hold (the "form of a slave"). Cyril read Nestorius as separating man from God by dividing their natures and placing both with the *prosopon* of Christ, the subject of the Incarnation. But for Cyril this separation threatened the integrity of the Incarnation.

It is important to note the lenses by which Nestorius and Cyril read this same text. Nestorius read Philippians with the intention to preserve the distinction of natures, which is why he elevates Paul's language of Christ and compares the two "forms." By specifying that it was Christ who took the form of a slave, Nestorius believes he is protecting the immutability of God. In other words, "Christ as God is unaffected by change."[14] Cyril's approach is to demonstrate the power of the union in its ability to bring about salvation through "assuming the form of a slave."[15] The Logos cannot assume what he already "enjoys." When the Logos takes the form of a slave he does so in his very nature, undivided and unchanged. Therefore, their respective readings of the text are shaped by contrary foundational strategies, and their particular exegetical methods shaped their christologies. In brief, the allegorical Alexandrine approach, which sought the spiritual meaning of the text, would eventually clash with the literal-historical-grammatical approach of the Antiochenes.

[14] Nestorius, *First Sermon*, in Norris, *The Christological Controversy*, 126.

[15] Cyril of Alexandria, *Letter to the Monks of Egypt*, in McGuckin, *The Christological Controversy*, 252.

Soteriology

Soteriology has already played a major role in understanding Cyril and Nestorius, both their christologies and the texts which inform them. This role should not be underestimated, considering that Cyril and Nestorius are primarily pastors, shepherding their flocks, before theologians meticulously dissecting Scripture. For both, a correct description of the Incarnation was a fundamental component of how Christians are saved. Consequently, to pervert that description, which each accused the other of doing, was to pervert Christ's salvation of the believer. Concerning the influence of soteriology on their christologies, Keating argues that their frame of reference is "strikingly similar,"[16] in that they "both rely on the Adam-Christ typology as the central frame of salvation, and both see the loss of the image of God in Adam as being crucially restored in Christ." While they shared the same biblical imagery regarding soteriology, Keating also notes that they diverge significantly "in how they view the endpoint of the restoration of our humanity."[17]

Both schools held to the understanding of salvation as divinization, or *theosis*;[18] however, certain subtleties emerged between how salvation took effect through the Incarnation and the christologies of each school. In general terms, the Antiochene tradition has been given the label "Word-man" christology, while the Alexandrine tradition carries the label "Word-flesh" christology.[19] Here the difference lies in *how* salvation is given through the Incarnation. For the Antiochenes, the Incarnation is necessary due to humankind's fall, which has corrupted the

[16] Keating, "Cyril and Nestorius," 91

[17] Ibid.

[18] For the purposes of this paper, the terms "divinization" and "*theosis*" will be used interchangeably.

[19] For an overview of each, see Olson, *Story of Christian Theology*, 205-207.

divine image of God in humanity. This corruption is reversed through Christ's renewal of the image of God in humanity by joining to that likeness and restoring it by resisting the guilt of sin which caused its original corruption. Nestorius writes, "He alone sufficed for renewing him who had originally fallen by the transgression of the observance of the commandments. Otherwise, He gave Himself for him to observe them because he sufficed not to keep himself without sin… For this reason He took the likeness of a servant which was without sin in its creation."[20]

For Nestorius and the Antiochene tradition, humankind's renewal and salvation occur because the divine Logos took on human likeness and through obedience restored that likeness. This is why, as Olson notes, the Antiochene "God-man" christology is considered to have emphasized the freedom of Jesus' human moral agency in his role of salvation. Therefore, their understanding of *theosis* relied heavily on the moral-ethical role of Jesus.[21] Nestorius says it more plainly is his *First Sermon*:

> Consequently, Christ assumed the person [*prosopon*] of the debt-ridden nature and by its mediation paid back the debt as a son of Adam . . . Because of his disobedience in the case of a tree, Adam was under sentence of punishment; Christ made up for this debt, too, "having become obedient" [Phil. 2:8] on a tree . . . He had assumed a person [*prosopon*] of the same nature [as ours] whose passions were removed by his passion."[22]

This explanation of the soteriological workings of the Incarnation requires a few observations. First, Christ is again the subject of the Incarnation, and his purpose is to rid the debt of sin through his "obedience," highlighting his moral agency. Second, Christ's primary imagery as a High Priest who atones for the sins of the people is consistent in Nestorius. Christ "assumes a person" in a similar way in which a High Priest assumes his place in the Temple. Third, this

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[20] Nestorius, *Bazaar*, 212.

[21] Olson, *Story of Christian Theology*, 205.

[22] Nestorius, *First Sermon*, in Norris, *The Christological Controversy*, 126-127.

description fits the characteristically Antiochene manner of avoiding any unification of divine and human natures in a way that would confuse the two. Consequently, scholars such as Sellers and Keating have deduced that the Antiochenes did argue for a separation of human and divine natures, and that the human will of Christ was subject and obedient to the divine will of Christ.[23]

The "Word-flesh" christology of the Alexandrine tradition is best characterized by the English word "appropriation." The chief influencer of Alexandrine thought concerning salvation is Athanasius of Alexandria (328-373 CE), whose teachings on salvation as appropriation are popularized by the following: "For He [the Logos] was made man that we might be made God."[24] Athanasius' apologetic work against the Arians demonstrated that the Logos was *homoousios* with the Father and unchanging in nature in the Incarnation. While the Arians rejected the word "become," and the Antiochenes would reject the implications of the same in Cyril's christology, this description was crucial to the Alexandrine understanding of salvation.[25] Jerry McCoy describes the basis for Athanasius' thought: "The necessary restoration of re-creation of man [humanity] required that it be the unchanging Logos himself who comes into our realm. It was because the first man, Adam, 'altered' that sin and death came into the world." [26] This salvific restoration occurred through the Logos "becoming man."

For Cyril, the subject of Christ was the Logos— "Christ *is* God the Word in the flesh because of our need to be restored and recreated by intimate connection with divine life and

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[23] See Sellars, *Two Ancient Christologies*, 143. Keating, "Cyril and Nestorius," 90.

[24] Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word*, 54. This work found in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series,* Vol. 4. Eds., Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Trans., Archibald Robertson (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1892).

[25] Jerry McCoy, "Philosophical Influences on the Doctrine of the Incarnation in Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria," *Encounter* 38 (1977): 366.

[26] Ibid, 365.

power." [27] While Cyril followed the soteriological framework of his Alexandrine forefathers, he developed his own language of describing the connection between the Incarnation and divinization. Keating describes Cyril's perspective on divinization in two senses: broad and strict.[28] The broad sense refers to the Alexandrine comprehensive view that human growth into the divine image is the goal of salvation. However, in the strict view, "divinization is the impartation of divine life affected in us through the agency of the indwelling Spirit in baptism, and through Christ's life-giving flesh in the Eucharist."[29] This "impartation of divine life" is made possible through the Incarnation, and specifically through the appropriation of human flesh and experience by the divine Logos. This impartation is then passed on to humans through their own participation in the divine life. Cyril describes this in his own reflection on John 14:20 which he describes in his Commentary:

> Therefore the only-begotten Word has become a partaker of flesh and blood, that is, he has become man … [that] he might restore it to his own life and render it through himself a partaker of God the Father … For this reason we have become "partakers of the divine nature," and are reckoned as sons, and so too have in ourselves the Father himself through the Son.[30]

These descriptions from Keating and example from Cyril's hand demonstrate an important underlying assumption in his soteriology which directly relates to his christology. For Cyril, the restoration of humanity can only happen by becoming "partakers in the divine image," and the opportunity for humans to become partakers happens by the divine Logos *becoming* flesh and

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[27] Keating, "Cyril and Nestorius," 86.

[28] The descriptions of Cyril's "strict and broad senses" as follows are found in Keating, "Cyril and Nestorius," 86-87.

[29] Ibid, 86.

[30] Daniel Keating, *The Appropriation of Divine Life in Cyril of Alexandria* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 8.

providing that connection between human and divine which was severed by Adam, the "first man."

Both the Antiochenes and Alexandrines, as represented by Cyril and Nestorius, upheld that the goal of salvation was the restoration of the "likeness" of humans to that which was given to them at Creation, the "likeness of God" (Gen 1:26-27). Both agreed that this "likeness" was restored through the Incarnation of the Logos in Christ. However, both diverged in precisely *how* the restoration was actualized. Clinging to his preferred Scriptures and metaphors, Nestorius argued that the appropriation of humanity leads to restoration through Christ's obedience, and subsequently our obedience to Christ. Cyril and the Alexandrines used their own Scriptures and metaphors to promote the appropriation of humanity by the Logos leading to restoration through the "impartation of divine life." While the divergence is a subtle aspect of their christologies, it does reinforce the competing implications of exactly how the Incarnation of Christ was actualized. The Antiochene way left more room for a distinction of Christ's two natures, while the Alexandrine way necessitated a complete union of the two.

Philosophy and Metaphysical Terminology

Scholars of this christological debate can hardly avoid a discussion on philosophical presuppositions and the metaphysical terminology used by Nestorius and Cyril. In fact, McLeod, Keating, McGuckin, and Greer all have demonstrated in their works that the metaphysics of these competing christologies is the lynchpin their divergence.[31] O'Keefe says it well: "the conflict emerges when the scriptural narrative collides with certain philosophical presuppositions

[31] Many of the works by these authors already cited above cannot avoid a discussion on Nestorius' use of *prosopon* or Cyril's understanding of *hypostasis*.

about what God can and cannot be like."[32] Not only did the schools of Antioch and Alexandria have different philosophical presuppositions, but their metaphysical and theological jargon was loaded with their own range of meanings. For example, both schools had different perspectives on the meanings of words like *prosopon* and *hypostasis*, causing confusion and misunderstanding when the proponents of these schools conversed with each other. While O'Keefe also warned (in the same article) about the dangers of becoming weighed down by the evolution of vocabulary, it is necessary to introduce the influence of these metaphysical categories and terms on the christological controversy.

Theodore of Mopsuestia also championed the Antiochene tradition concerning their metaphysical presuppositions, and his influence on Nestorius is also seen in his metaphysics. Most relevant to this study are the terms *prosopon* and *hypostasis*. McLeod states that Theodore had a characteristically Aristotelian perspective on reality which favored the concrete over the abstract.[33] Following the Antiochene tradition of literal interpretation, Theodore "derived his specific meanings of these terms from a literal interpretation" of how they were used in Scripture.[34] This perspective is manifested in how he viewed the relationship between the *prosopon* and *hypostasis*. He viewed the *hypostasis* as the concrete reality of a being with a nature (*physis*), and the *prosopon* as the physical manifestation of that *hypostasis*. Each nature (*physis*) had its own reality (*hypostasis*) and physical manifestation (*prosopon*) of that reality. Therefore one can see how Theodore, and also Nestorius, had difficulty with Cyril's language of

[32] O'Keefe, "Impassible Suffering," 41. I would add "biblical metaphors" to this statement.

[33] For further discussion on his interpretation of Theodore's metaphysics, see McLeod, *The Image of God*, 129-135.

[34] McLeod, "Christology in Theodore of Mopsuestia," 117.

a "union of *hypostases*," because one hypostasis would necessarily absorb the other (in this case the divine absorbs the human) and this would causes Christ's nature to be altered in the Incarnation.[35] No matter how Cyril presented it, the Antiochenes could not regard a union of hypostases to be viable, because it inevitably led to a corruption or confusion of the divine and human natures in Christ.

The Antiochenes also had a different perspective on the *prosopon,* a word which Cyril did not prefer when describing the union in Christ. Theodore described two usages of *prosopon* regarding the Incarnation: one common *prosopon* and two individual *prosopa*. In general, "Theodore almost always uses the term to express how a 'person' as a particular self performs in ways appropriate to his or her hypostatic nature or … as … 'the self-manifestation of an individual.'"[36] The common *prosopon* in Christ was the visible manifestation of Christ during his earthly life which demonstrated his hypostatic nature (both divine and human). The two individual *prosopa* referred to the two natures of the Word and Jesus that are each free to express their respective *hypostases*. The dual understanding of *prosopon* allowed Theodore to demonstrate the unity of Christ's divine and human *hypostases* while also avoiding their confusion. McLeod writes, "For Theodore, this meant that the Word can reveal His power and glory through His visible humanity and Christ's humanity can also share in the Word's prerogatives as Son."[37]

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[35] McLeod, *The Image of God*, 132.

[36] McLeod, "Christology in Theodore of Mopsuestia," 119.

[37] McLeod, *The Image of God*, 133. In the next chapter, Cyril's language of *communication idiomatum* will sound quite similar, although for his this communication took place in the *hypostasis* rather than the *prosopon*.

These metaphysical presuppositions, and the meanings they gave to these terms, were also present in Nestorius' writings, primarily his *Bazaar*.[38] The importance of these presuppositions directly apply to how Nestorius and Cyril described the union of Christ. For instance, Leonard Hodgson argues that Nestorius applied the term *hypostasis* in the "older sense," equivalent to *ousia*.[39] Hodgson argues that Nestorius' preference for the word *prosopon* to describe the union of Christ rests on two principles: 1) That the divine and human *ousiai* are two different and antithetical things and must remain distinct in the union. For the two *ousiai* to become fused meant that Christ's *ousia* would become some new thing; 2) That the union was necessarily voluntary from both the divine and human parties. Neither could be constrained by the other.[40] This explains his reaction against Cyril's "hypostatic union" as a confusion of divine and human *ousiai*, something that was illogical. So the burden on Nestorius was to describe the union of Christ in a way that represented a true union, not a mere illusion of one. Whereas Cyril regarded the term *prosopon* as the mere external appearance of a thing, for Nestorius the *prosopon* was no mere "appearance," rather it was the real element of a thing. In other words, Nestorius considered the *prosopon* to be a necessary component of an *ousia*, just as Cyril thought the same of the *hypostasis*. In this respect, Hodgson suggests that Nestorius did not believe in the "Two Sons" heresy; rather he believed in a "real metaphysical unity" within the *prosopon*.[41]

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[38] Keating notes that each chapter of his *Bazaar* is dedicated to a particular metaphysical term: *ousia, hypostasis, physis,* and *prosopon*. Keating, "Cyril and Nestorius," 91.

[39] Leonard Hodgson, "The Metaphysics of Nestorius," *JTS* 19, no. 73 (1917): 47. McLeod would say that the Antiochenes used *hypostasis* as synonymous with *physis* (nature). See McLeod, *The Image of God*, 132.

[40] Hodgson, "The Metaphysics of Nestorius," 47-48.

[41] Ibid, 51.

Within the Alexandrine tradition, Athanasius laid much of the groundwork upon which Cyril would later build. Athanasius was highly influenced by a combination of sources which fused together over time to create the Christian concept of the divine Logos; these influences were primarily drawn from Philo's thought, Middle Platonism, and the work of the Apologists, and had "crystallized" by the time of Athanasius.[42] One example of Athanasius' use of the Logos concept is drawn from his interpretation of the Philippians 2 passage, in which the Logos "become flesh." McCoy notes that for Athanasius the act of "taking flesh" was "so intense that one can and must say the 'the Logos *is* man.'"[43] This has implications on the popular Alexandrine metaphor of the body and soul, representing the divine and human natures of Christ. McCoy describes Athanasius' position as "the human soul fulfills the same function in relation to the human body that the Logos does in relation to the *cosmos*."[44] In describing the Incarnation, Athanasius spoke of the divine Logos as replacing the human soul, and thus giving life to the human body. Grillmeier has noted, "There can be no doubt that the Logos is not merely the personal subject of Christ's bodily life, but also the real, physical source of all the actions of his life … Athanasius, in true Alexandrian fashion, first looks at the relationship of Logos to world, soul to body, Logos to flesh."[45] Cyril would later expand this body-soul metaphor which Athanasius employed.

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[42] Jerry McCoy, "Philosophical Influences on the Doctrine of the Incarnation in Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria," *Encounter* 38 (1977): 370. McCoy follows the development of the Logos concept in Christian thought on the following pages.

[43] Ibid., 368.

[44] Ibid., 373.

[45] Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition,* 312-313.

The Alexandrine philosophical approach was characteristically Platonic, which is demonstrated in Cyril's continuation of the body-soul metaphor for the Incarnation as a demonstration of the relationship between human and divine natures. McCoy describes Cyril's use of the body-soul metaphor as Neo-Platonic, in that Cyril argued that the human soul was impassible and immortal, while the human soul would also "make its own things of the body while remaining impassible."[46] He would then extend this argument to the divine nature of the Logos (soul) and the human nature of Jesus (body). Furthermore, McCoy argues that Cyril was influenced by the commonly-known "substance metaphysics" of his day, in which "the human and divine natures [were conceived as] two different substances and further caused him to look to the way substances may be combined."[47] This influenced where Cyril would look to draw his analogy for the unification of the human and divine natures in Christ.

In turn, Cyril utilized the philosophical toolbelt given him, which influenced the way he employed relevant metaphysical terms: *ousia*, *physis*, *hypostasis*, and *prosopon*. While many scholars have downgraded his philosophical prowess in favor of his theological strength, others consider him to be philosophically adept.[48] One of the most important metaphysical constructs Cyril utilizes is *mia physis* (one nature) in his commonly used phrase "one nature of the Incarnate Word," which caused considerable conflict with the Antiochenes when he used it in his description of the Incarnation. For Cyril, the union of the divine and human *physes* was so intimate that it formed one *physis* to that degree that the divine Logos could experience human

[46] McCoy, "Philosophical Influences," 386.

[47] Ibid.

[48] L. Wickham, Norman Russell, and others have made the claim that he is not "accepted as a philosopher" (See Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*, 5). However, scholars like Ruth Siddals, Sergey Trostyanskiy, and Jerry McCoy have demonstrated Cyril's ability to understand and employ philosophical concepts.

suffering. For the Antiochenes, this union caused a mixing of natures that corrupted the original natures, causing the divine nature to no longer be immutable. However, Cyril rejected the accusation of this kind of mixture, and instead argued that a union (*henosis*) of natures (*physis*) in the subsistence (*hypostases*) of the divine Logos did not constitute a mixture leading to confusion, but a union leading to a completely shared condition. Sergey Trostyanskiy describes Cyril's notion of *henosis* as both union and distinction: "It is the Word of God who shapes the humanity by giving it a degree of order and beauty of the divine realm. A radical distinction that disallows for intermingling of natures, nevertheless, does not prevent natures from being in communication, allowing human beings to share in the divine life."[49]

Summary

At this point we have examined the hermeneutical, soteriological, and metaphysical factors which influenced both Nestorius and Cyril through their respective traditions. These factors and presuppositions informed their christologies and how they viewed each other's writings in opposition. This chapter follows the diverging influences which existed even before Nestorius or Cyril began their heated correspondence, and the next chapter will examine how these divergences manifested themselves in their own christologies. In their own time they could not see past the disparity, each considering the other to have left out vital components of an orthodox description of the Incarnation.[50]

The divergent approaches of the Antiochene and Alexandrine traditions reveal the fundamental goals of Cyril and Nestorius as they formulated their christologies. For Nestorius, it

[49] Sergey Trostyanskiy, *St. Cyril of Alexandria's Metaphysics of the Incarnation* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2016) 20.

[50] Keating, "Cyril and Nestorius," 78.

was to protect the distinctness of individual divine and human natures in Christ by describing their union in a way that excluded any kind of mixture language. For Cyril, it was to protect the intimate unity of the Word of God and humanity by describing the union in a way that demonstrated a true unity. Two fundamental Christian principles were at stake, and each intended to maintain both while inevitably emphasizing one over the other. The first being that Jesus Christ is one Person, God who became man, and the second being that in Christ are the two elements of divinity and humanity, remaining real and complete in their union.[51] Due to the influence of their presuppositions, Cyril emphasized the former and Nestorius the latter.

Most studies of Nestorius and Cyril examine their exegesis of Scripture and the metaphors they are drawn to in view of their metaphysics, but it is important to remember that while Nestorius and Cyril were capable philosophers, they were primarily pastors who were concerned about their flock and theologians concerned about the orthodoxy of Christian tradition. The primary tool in the development of their christologies was their exegesis of Scripture, which shaped their foundational assumptions about God and humanity. Their soteriology was the driving force of their christologies. Cyril was especially concerned that Nestorius' objections to *theotokos* was an affront to divine nature of Christ, and thus to the salvific power of his appropriation of humanity to his divine nature. Finally, they each used metaphors as expression of their metaphysical assumptions to explain their models of the Incarnation. The imagery they continually returned to became the vehicle of their metaphysical description of the Incarnation. The metaphysical terms they used were shaped by the biblical texts and metaphors they utilized to describe their christologies. Ultimately, these factors contributed to the formation of Cyril and Nestorius' christologies, along with their divergences.

[51] Sellars, *Two Ancient Christologies*, xiii.

Chapter Two

The Diverging Christologies of Cyril and Nestorius

The Christology of Nestorius

The initial spark of the controversy began with Nestorius and his rejection of the theological term *theotokos*, "bearer of God," as applied to Mary. However, this term had less to say about Mary than it did about Jesus Christ, in that it was a statement which affirmed the divine status of Jesus as God.[1] The claim of divinity was not what astonished Nestorius, but rather the poor usage of terminology which the phrase demonstrated. Nestorius argued that it was inaccurate to call Mary the "bearer of God," but rather the "bearer of Christ," or *christotokos*. It was Nestorius' line of thought that "strictly speaking" Mary did not give birth to God, but to the person Jesus Christ. To him the title *christotokos* spoke neither against Christ as God or man, and it demonstrated that Mary neither gave birth to God nor a mere man. It was important to Nestorius to place great care on the semantic meanings of words. For example, Bethune-Baker notes that "he repeatedly insists that the terms 'Christ', 'Son', 'Lord' are the proper terms to use of the incarnate Word" and Nestorius defended himself often with the argument that the "Evangelists and apostles … never said that 'God' was born or died."[2]

Unfortunately for Nestorius, his local opponents picked up on his "strictly speaking" argument and created plaques all over Constantinople with the inscription, "If Mary is not, strictly speaking, the Mother of God, then her son is not, strictly speaking, God."[3] It could be that

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[1] Bethune-Baker, *Nestorius and His Teaching*, 57-58.

[2] Ibid., 60.

[3] McGuckin, *The Christological Controversy*, 28-29.

some of his downfall was caused by the religious and political support around Marian devotion, which had grown over the past century, and especially his conflict with Empress Pulcheria.[4] Nestorius was accused by his opponents for resurrecting the Adoptionist heresy of Paul of Samosata, in which Jesus was born a mere man with the divine indwelling of the Logos, maintaining a strict separation of the divine and human natures. However, it is more probable that Nestorius was seeking to maintain peace in his See by reaching common ground in the precision of terms. John McGuckin notes that is was the importance of semantics which fueled much of Nestorius' Christology, and spark of the *theotokos* controversy was a prime example of the "terminological carelessness" which greatly disturbed Nestorius.[5]

Eventually, Nestorius made the public gesture of attacking the *theotokos* title in a series of sermons. His rejection was made for a series of reasons, all of which had strong implications for his christology. One reason was that the title did not use biblical language, relating back to his literal hermeneutic, which he believed to be problematic for christological orthodoxy if the title was not also accompanied with the title "Mother of the Man" (*anthropotokos*).[6] This maintained the divine and human natures of Christ in way that Nestorius thought was more appropriate to each. But this leads to the question which is at the heart of this christological debate: exactly *how* were the two natures related to the person of Jesus Christ? To Nestorius, this question also required careful semantics regarding the terms used to describe the union of natures.

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[4] Phillip Dancy, "Nestorius and the Rejection of Theotokos: His Political and Social Condemnation," *Fides et Historia* 37/38, no 2/1 (2005): 155, 160-161.

[5] John McGuckin, "The Christology of Nestorius of Constantinople," *Patristic and Byzantine Review* 7, no. 2-3 (1988): 104.

[6] McGuckin, *The Christological Controversy*, 155.

At the heart of Nestorius' christology was a desire to maintain the singularity of the person of Jesus Christ while concurrently maintaining the distinction in his two natures, even though his opponents alleged otherwise.[7] Many would find this to be ironic because Cyril's most frequent accusation against Nestorius is that his description of Christ divides the natures, creating two sons. Consequently, Nestorius is constantly accused of the "Two Sons" christological heresy of Theodore of Mopsuestia, his mentor. Concerning the natures of Christ, Nestorius upheld the divinity and humanity of Christ's natures, but resisted any sort of "mixture" (*krasis*) language, which he considered to be Apollinarist.[8] In order to give a sound description of the Incarnation, Nestorius took great care in distinguishing the natures in a way that did not divide the person. He was especially concerned with Cyril's language of *communicatio idiomatum*, or the communication of attributes between the divine and human natures, which he considered foolish and confusing. Thus, Nestorius maintained a distinction of natures in the Incarnation, for to say that "God suffered" was bordering on heresy.

Both the strength and weakness of Nestorius' description lies in his use of the term *prosopon*. McGuckin notes that Nestorius preferred the word *prosopon* to *hypostasis* when describing the reality of Christ in the Incarnation. He writes, "Prosopon, like hypostasis, is related to the *physis* [nature] in so far as it is a referent for the concreteness and individuation, but it differs from the range of meanings attached to *physis* in being a more specific term, having a distinct sense of 'the individual character of something as manifested to observation.'"[9] In

[7] Anastos, "Nestorius," 127.

[8] McGuckin, *The Christological Controversy*, 130. Counter-argument to this can be found in McLeod, *The Image of God*, 174-177.

[9] Ibid., 143.

other words, Nestorius used *prosopon* to refer to the reality of Christ, both in nature and in physical manifestation. Nestorius believed using this term would maintain the unity of Christ while also allowing distinction in natures. So, Nestorius argued that Christ had two *prosopa*, one divine originating from the Logos and one human originating from the fleshly Incarnation.[10]

Nestorius observed these *prosopa* in the way that Scripture presented Christ. In certain passages, Scripture witnesses Christ exercising human properties, such as becoming tired or hungry, and Nestorius attributed these behaviors to Christ's human *prosopon.* While in other Scriptures Christ gives evidence of divine *prosopon* through omniscience and performing miracles. In fact, it was common for Nestorius to demonstrate this distinction by talking about "the man Jesus" and "the divine Logos," a seemingly blatant separation of the divine and human natures. At this, his accusers were adamant that he was professing the heretical "Two Sons" Christology, but Nestorius had his own way of describing the union of the natures in Christ:

> In one Christ two natures without confusion … that there is of the divinity and of the humanity one Christ and one Lord and one Son … there both exists and is named one Christ, the two of them [i.e., the natures] being united, he who was born of the Father in the divinity, and of the holy virgin in the humanity, for there was a union of the two natures.[11]

In another effort to avoid "mixture" language Nestorius preferred the term conjunction (*synapheia*) to Cyril's hypostatic union. The two natures in Jesus, divine and human, were intimately joined without confusion in the person Jesus Christ.

The distinction in natures described by conjunction was problematic, in that it suggests two persons (*prosopa*) rather than one. To solve this conundrum, Nestorius appealed to the

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[10] McLeod argues that Nestorius' Christology is practically a regurgitation of his predecessor, Theodore of Mopsuestia. For of description of Theodore's Christology in relation to the terms *prosopon* and *hypostasis*, see McLeod, "The Christology in Theodore," 117-119.

[11] Nestorius, *Bazaar*, 295-296. Quoted in Anastos, "Nestorius," 128.

observable reality of the Incarnation as the unity of Christ, in a theory which is called "Prosopic Reality" by McGuckin (and others). He provides a succinct description of the Nestorian position:

> The eyes of faith recognise in Christ two clearly observed aspects of his reality, which signify to the beholder divinity as well as humanity. Christ, therefore, has two prosopa. At the same time the eyes of faith recognise that this Christ who has two prosopa is not the same as those prosopa themselves… Christ is not only a word for the union of these two prosopic realities, it is also the concrete experience, in some way, of how that union has taken place, how it is to be conceived, and how it ought to be articulated by the church….In light of this it is not enough merely to insist that there are two prosopa in Christ, because the experience of the unique revelation of Christ calls for the confession that these is also the 'prosopon of union' the one Christ who manifests in a single prosopon (observable reality)...[12]

Nestorius clearly saw in Scripture two distinct natures, divine and human, which were manifested as a singular *prosopon* in Christ. Therefore, it was ridiculous to Nestorius that his accusers should find two sons in his description, because the apostles and others who witnessed Jesus clearly observed a single person, not two.[13]

However, not all scholars are convinced that Nestorius was arguing for a union of *prosopa*, but that Nestorius argued (in his *Bazaar* after his exile) for a union of *ousia* in the one *prosopon* of Christ. For instance, Anastos writes, "So, when he says that God the Word became man, he means that the manhood of Jesus formed a distinct usia [*ousia*] alongside the usia [*ousia*] of God, and that the two were joined together in the prosopon."[14] Thus Nestorius describes the human and divine *prosopa* in the Incarnate Word as the concrete manifestation of their *ousiai*, or foundational essence. This union as described by Nestorius in his *Bazaar* is

[12] McGuckin, *The Christological Controversy*, 157.

[13] After the discovery of his *Bazaar* at the end of the 19th century, modern scholars began to question the accuracy of the accusations against Nestorius. For a history of those interpretations, see Braaten, "Modern Interpretations," 251-267.

[14] Anastos, "Nestorius," 127.

different than “Two Sons” allegations from his enemies, because the divine and human natures would have been united metaphysically and manifested as one physically.

For Nestorius the union of Christ’s natures was a ‘conjunction by interrelation’ (*schetike synapheia*) of the two *prosopa*. The Divine Logos intimately bound himself to the human Jesus without corrupting or negating the limited human nature with the omni-attributes of the divine nature. Nestorius believed that the two natures were unequal, the divine being infinitely stronger, and thus the only way for both to exist in the single prosopon (Christ) was through “a meeting of loving wills that unite at the highest commitment of each capacity, a meeting that is made possible and initiated by the condescension in love from the part of God.”[15] In this description, each *prosopon* had its own *hypostasis*, and the two were intimately joined by self-giving love. While two wills seem to imply “Two Sons” Nestorius was more concerned with the end product than their sources. While two wills came together, and yet maintained some metaphysical distinction, Nestorius still considered there to be one person in the Incarnation: Jesus Christ, who exhibited both human and divine natures. Nestorius would not allow a union which created “Two Sons” or a confusing mixture of the human and divine. Thus, two factors stand behind Nestorius understanding of the union: first, the incarnation could in no way cause the Logos to experience change or passion, and second, in order for humanity’s redemption to be effective, Christ had to live a “genuinely human life.”[16]

However, modern scholars who oppose Nestorius claim the weakness of his description is that he uses *prosopon* to describe both the natures (*physis*) and the physical manifestation

[15] McGuckin, *The Christological Controversy*, 168.

[16] Kyle, “Nestorius: The Partial Rehabilitation,” 79-80.

(*prosopon*) of Christ.[17] Both Keating and McGuckin claim that Nestorius' prosopic union failed to attribute the eternal Logos as the real subject of Christ, or in other words that Christ *is* the Logos in human nature. Recalling his primary metaphor of Christ as temple and the Logos as the "one who dwells," this critique is substantial. But scholars who hope to redeem Nestorius see otherwise. Anastos argues (following Loofs and others) that Nestorius uses *prosopon* in two different senses.[18] The usage of Sense A was "the exterior aspect or appearance of a thing," while Sense B was closer to the modern understanding of "person," and Nestorius used the term in this way "as the designation for Jesus Christ, 'the common prosopon of the two natures.'"[19] In this sense Nestorius may have not been arguing for a union of two prosopa, but that the *prosopa* of Jesus Christ was the *prosopa* of the divine Logos. Consider Nestorius' description of the union from his *Bazaar*:

> It is by person [*prosopon*] that He (the Son) is distinguished (from the Father). But it is not so in regard to the union of the Godhead and the manhood. He is not by the union in all those things the person by its nature is, so that in the one person He should become another *ousia*. For He took man's person, not the *ousia* or the nature, so that it should be either *homoousios* with the Father or else another Son altogether and not the same Son. For the manhood is the person of the Godhead, and the Godhead is the person of the manhood: but they (the manhood and the Godhead) are distinct in nature and distinct in the union.[20]

Notice that Nestorius was concerned that a union of natures would cause the human nature to become indistinguishable from the nature of the Godhead, so instead Nestorius described the

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[17] For more on the weakness of Nestorius' description see Keating, "Cyril and Nestorius," 92-93; McGuckin, *The Christological Controversy*, 169-172; Wickham, *Cyril of Alexandria*, xix-xx.

[18] Anastos, "Nestorius," 129-131. For other defenses of Nestorius' two senses of *prosopon* see Kyle, "Nestorius: The Partial Rehabilitation," 81; Grillmeier, *Christ and Christian Tradition*, 549-460; Justo Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970) 371-372.

[19] Anastos, "Nestorius," 130.

[20] Nestorius, *Bazaar*, 79.

union in terms to the *prosopon*. Anastos interprets Nestorius as arguing for the human and divine prosopa (Sense A) being united but not identical with the two natures, and that the union of the two natures (which he called *ousia*) *manifested* itself in the one *prosopa* (Sense B) of Jesus Christ.[21]

Whether Nestorius wanted the union to happen at the prosopic level or at the natural level, his description caused his own terminological problems. Regardless of this confusion, it is clearer now that Nestorius may not have meant to teach "Two Sons," nor did he see his description as a failure to adequately unite the Logos and the man Jesus. However, Cyril took a different approach and had the union occur at the hypostatic level. While Nestorius considered this to be problematic, due to the unequal status of the natures, Cyril required a union at this level, as will be seen in his description.

The Christology of Cyril

What Nestorius saw in the term *theotokos* as inaccurate and crude, Cyril saw as a description of the great truth realized in the mystery of the Incarnation, the self-emptying of the Logos.[22] It was primarily a declaration of Jesus Christ as God, in opposition to an understanding of Christ as anything less than the full representation of deity. *Theotokos* was also a proclamation of the humanity of Jesus as Cyril links the term to "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us," (John 1:14) a concept which Cyril exhausts in his description of the person and nature of Christ. For Cyril, it was a beautiful term which encapsulated the Incarnation by presenting the divine and human natures of Christ.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Sellers, *Two Ancient Christologies*, 85.

Cyril wrote his *Commentary on John* before the outbreak of the Nestorian controversy, but the Fourth Gospel clearly had a profound impact on Cyril's christology, forming the roots of his understanding of the Incarnation. Cyril approached this Christological controversy from a soteriological standpoint, namely, the doctrine of *theosis* (divinization).[23] In this respect it was vital that the Word "became" flesh, to experience the fullness of humanity. Christ did not assume or embody flesh but became flesh in nature. Likewise, the Word "dwelt among us," meaning that he did not abandon his divine nature. Cyril writes,

> Observe how they say that God is in him, without separating the Word from the flesh. Moreover, they maintain that there is no God besides him, uniting with the Word that which he wore, as his own particular property, that is to say, the temple he took from the Virgin. For Christ is one from both.[24]

Thus the "dwelling" of the Word in the flesh is what prevents the confusion of natures, while the "becoming" of flesh demonstrates the unity of natures. The phrase "Christ is one from both" demonstrates his unity, but Cyril refrains from using that construction later in the controversy with Nestorius due to its problematic nature.[25]

Cyril disclosed his understanding of the Incarnate Word in his first book of *Against Nestorius* to argue in favor of *theotokos*, which he does using three primary arguments. The first relates to Cyril's understanding of human birth as a prerequisite for becoming flesh. He writes, "Tell me, then, how could he have become flesh, if he had not received birth from a woman, since the laws of human existence demand this and corporeal existence could not have been

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[23] Keating, "Cyril and Nestorius," 86.

[24] Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on John*, trans. Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*, 106.

[25] Russell notes that Cyril no longer uses the term after the controversy began. This is probably because the phrase sounds like a confusion of natures (*mia physis*) when Cyril actually was working with an assumption of the hypostatic union of the two natures. For more on the phrase "one from both" see Mark Edwards, "One Nature of the Word Enfleshed," *Harvard Theological Review* 108, no. 2 (2015): 289-306. Edwards provides a nuanced position on Cyril's understanding of the nature(s) of Christ.

initiated in any other way?"[26] In other words, true human existence necessitates true corporeal birth. So, for the Word to become flesh Jesus had to experience human birth. The second argument relates to Christ's ability to transform. According to Cyril, "If he had not been born like us according to the flesh, if he had not partaken of the same elements as we do, he would not have delivered human nature from the fault we incurred in Adam, nor would he have warded off the decay from our bodies, nor would he have brought to an end the power of the curse which we say came upon the first."[27] It was necessary that the Word become true flesh, for if he did not then he would have lacked the ability to redeem human flesh from the curse. Cyril adopted the famous saying of Gregory Nazianzen, "What he [the Logos] has not assumed, he has not healed."[28] Thus Cyril also required that the flesh be assumed to be redeemed. This led to Cyril's final conclusion, "Christ is truly God, the one and only Son of God the Father, not divided separately as man and similarly as God, but the same existing both as Word from God the Father and as human being from a woman, who is like is while at the same time remaining God."[29] Christ is by nature both the Word of God and a human man, not divide but existing as one. And the Word is the same as God the Father. Thus, if Christ is God, and if Christ truly became flesh, and if to become flesh means experiencing the corporeal birth of a woman, then Mary was in this sense *theotokos*.

This final movement in his efforts to defend the *theotokos* title required further explanation, which Cyril provides both in his *Letters* to Nestorius and his less circulated work

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[26] Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*, 133.

[27] Ibid., 134.

[28] Gregory Nazianzen, *Letter to Cledonius*, Ep. 101, *PG*, 37, 176-193.

[29] Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*, 136.

Against Nestorius. Since much of Cyril's explanation of the hypostatic union of Christ's natures is developed in response to Nestorius, his christology will also be described and compared against Nestorius. The greatest critique Cyril made on Nestorius was that his description divided Christ into "Two Sons," which was soteriologically problematic, in that Christ could not be two persons metaphysically and Christ had to both human and divine to redeem humanity.

A major contribution of Cyril to christology was how he explained the union divine and human natures in the Incarnation. It would be helpful to introduce Cyril's christology by following the methodology of John McGuckin, of "what," "why," and "how," which form the three major threads of Cyril's Christology.[30] The "what" of his Christology is the singleness of person and the fullness of both humanity and divinity. This was crucial to Cyril, because he saw any division of person or nature of Christ to have drastic soteriological consequences, which leads to the "why" of his Christology. Cyril regarded the Incarnation as a "dynamic soteriological event," in which the unity of the natures facilitated the restoration of humanity through the flesh of Christ. [31] Finally, the "how" becomes his metaphysical and theological description of the union (*henosis*) of the natures (*hypostases*) of Christ, or the hypostatic union. What follows is an attempt to give a systematic explanation of Cyril's hypostatic union theory.

Much of Cyril's description of the Word "becoming" flesh has been delineated above, but one further observation must be made, regarding exactly how Cyril allowed for such an event. Rather, it is important to describe what Cyril *does not* mean by "became flesh." It was necessary that Cyril make the distinction that the Word did not become human by "assumption," which was Apollinarist, in that God merely "put on" flesh, or by "association," a word that the Antiochenes

[30] McGuckin, *The Christological Controversy*, 194-196.

[31] Ibid. 195.

preferred which connoted a greater distinction in natures. Cyril considered both a failure to convey the "power and intimacy of the 'Union' between divinity and humanity."[32] Instead Cyril describes the Incarnation event as

> the Word, in an ineffable and incomprehensible manner, ineffably united to himself flesh animated with a rational soul, and thus became man and was called the Son of Man. This was not effected only as a matter of will, of favour, or by the assumption of a single prosopon. While the natures that were brought together into this true unity were different, nonetheless there is One Christ and Son from out of both. This did not involve the negation of different natures, rather that the Godhead and manhood by their ineffable and indescribable consilience into unity achieved One Lord and Christ and Son for us.[33]

While Cyril maintains here a hint of the mystery of the union, his language strongly favors an intimate union of natures which, as he will develop later, do not negate each other. In addition, the result of this union is the single *prosopon* of Jesus Christ, yet through a stronger union that he considered Nestorius could demonstrate.

Whereas Nestorius maintained a distinction of natures through conjunction of the two *prosopa,* Cyril demanded a union at a more intimate level, the *hypostases*. The singular person of the Incarnation was in fact the divine Logos who was united hypostatically with humanity. Cyril frequently described the Incarnate Logos as "enfleshed" (*sesarkomene*), in that the Logos "appropriates" (*oikesis*) human nature hypostatically with the result that the human nature ontologically becomes the human nature of the Logos.[34] Cyril described this divine-human interaction as the "economy of salvation" which he thought answered both the "why" and the "how" of the Incarnation. Cyril argued that the Logos, incarnate in Jesus Christ, was not "naked"

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[32]John McGuckin, *On the Unity of Christ*, in *St. Vladimir's Seminary Press Popular Patristics Series*, no. 13. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995), 34.

[33] McGuckin, *The Christological Controversy*, 263.

[34] McGuckin, *The Christological Controversy*, 184.

(*gymnos*) of his divine attributes, but that they were "enfleshed" in human nature.[35] This allows for a transformation of human nature, in that the divine nature is enfleshed and experienced through the fragility and passibility of humanity. Ultimately, Jesus is glorified in the flesh, allowing all of humanity to be glorified. Thomas Keating regards Cyril's "signal contribution" to christology as "his insistence on the Word as the single subject in Christ."[36]

A union at the hypostatic level was not illogical to Cyril, who provided several analogies to support his logic. Even before the christological controversy with Nestorius, Cyril described the union at the Incarnation in terms of a coal and fire in his *Commentary on Isaiah*.[37] The coal in Isaiah 6:6 was appropriated with fire, just as the human *hypostasis* was appropriated by the Logos. A second analogy Cyril draws upon is a lily and its scent, which he used to demonstrate how the incorporeal scent and the corporeal flower are distinct yet they are both called "lily."[38] However his most utilized analogy of the union of humanity and divinity was the union of body and soul. While the body and soul are two dissimilar elements they are nonetheless unified in the human being, an embodied soul.[39] Everything a human did was an action of both the body and soul, and likewise the human and divine natures "came together in a mysterious and incomprehensible union without change or confusion," as an indivisible union.[40]

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[35] Ibid., 186.

[36] Keating, "Cyril and Nestorius," 86.

[37] Cf. his *Commentary on Isaiah* 6:6. See McKinion, *Words, Imagery, and the Mystery*, 197.

[38] Cyril, *Scholia on the Incarnation*, 9. Found in Pusey, LFC, vol. 47, 192.

[39] However, McGuckin notes that Cyril had taken for granted as "obvious and self-evident" the distinctness of the soul and body, such that the Antiochenes could not appreciate the metaphor which instigated their own fears of its theological conclusions. See McGuckin, *The Christological Controversy*, 198.

[40] McGuckin, *On the Unity of Christ*, 77-78.

According to Cyril's appropriation theory, not only did the human nature benefit from the divine nature through appropriation, but the divine was "enhanced" by the humanity for the sake of God's philanthropic relationship with humanity. Cyril had to be careful not to corrupt the immutability of God nor shame the divinity of God by saying that God was lacking something without a human nature. Instead Cyril says that God "thought it good to be made man and in his (*sic*) own person to reveal our nature honored in the dignities of the divinity."[41] Cyril saw the Logos' appropriation to humanity as paradoxically mysterious and the heart of his christological argument, which opened him up to new possibilities of language that shocked Nestorius and the Antiochenes. For Cyril it was perfectly logical to say that the Logos "suffered impassibly," in that it was not merely the divine Logos who suffered in his own nature but the Logos-enfleshed-within-history who suffered. Cyril describes it in this way in his *Second Letter* to Nestorius:

> So it is we say that he both suffered and rose again; not meaning that the Word of God suffered in his own nature either the scourging, of the piercing of the nails, of the other wounds, for the divinity is impassible because it is incorporeal. But in so far as that which had become his own body suffered, the he himself is said to suffer these things for our sake, because the Impassible One was in the suffering body. We understand his death in the same manner.[42]

Here, the Logos truly experienced suffering and death *because* he truly became flesh, uniting himself to human nature. Within this economy, the Logos was able to bring about salvation. To divide these natures into two *hypostases,* as Cyril accused Nestorius of doing, was to destroy the economy of salvation for all of humanity. Instead, Cyril claimed Nestorius taught that Jesus of

[41] Ibid., 55.

[42] Cyril, *Second Letter to Nestorius,* v.

Nazareth was merely a man to be worshipped alongside the Logos, which was to him was dishonorable.[43]

The implication of Cyril's union allowed him to push metaphysical limits in a way that truly disturbed Nestorius and the Antiochenes. Cyril justified the language that the Logos "suffered impassibly" through the *communicatio idiomatum*. For Cyril, the Logos only experienced death insofar as it was his own flesh which experienced death. In other words, it was not the human *prosopa* alone which experienced death, as he thought Nestorius taught, but it was the Logos being hypostatically joined to humanity which experienced death (not the finality of death in divine nature, but the enfleshed nature). In Christ, the human attributes of the man Jesus could be applied to the divine Logos, and vice versa.

Thomas Weinandy considers *communicatio idiomatum* to be the "hermeneutical key for unlocking Cyril's christology," using the Nicene Creed as his precedence. The Creed stated that the same (*homoousion*) from the Father "became incarnate of the Virgin Mary."[44] For Cyril, *communicatio idiomatum* accomplished two things. First, it assured the oneness of Christ by making the Logos the single subject of the Incarnation, also allowing Cyril to say that "God wept." Second, it was the vehicle by which salvation occurred. The enfleshed Logos did not suffer in his divinity, but "he does suffer in his humanity which he has appropriated as his own" and, "by suffering in the flesh, the sufferings of the flesh are transfigured, and by dying in the flesh the Godhead definitively conquers death.[45] Cyril considered Christ's flesh as "lifegiving" (1 Cor. 15) and he explained it this way:

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[43] Ibid., vi.

[44] Weinandy, "Cyril and the Mystery of the Incarnation," in *The Theology of St. Cyril*, 31.

[45] McGuckin, *The Christological Controversy*, 202-203.

> We proclaim the death according to the flesh of the Only begotten Son of God, and confess the return to life from the dead of Jesus Christ, and his ascension … and in this way approach mystical blessings and are sanctified, becoming participants in the holy flesh … We do not receive this as ordinary flesh, God forbid, or as flesh of a man sanctified and conjoined [*synapheia*] to the Word in a unity of dignity … No, we receive it as truly the lifegiving and very-flesh of the Word himself.[46]

This passage expresses the beauty that Cyril saw in the Incarnation; the victory over sin and death by the Logos who willingly and fully became flesh, suffered, died, and was raised, so that we could participate in his flesh (especially through the Eucharist).

Concluding Remarks

It is plain to see how the two theologians approached the Incarnation from quite different perspectives. Much of the development of their christologies seems to be in reaction against the other, while being guided by their own a priori assumptions. Though they found common ground in their effort to depict Jesus Christ as both fully human and fully divine, their disparate emphases on various aspects of the debate created a disconnect. Nestorius sought a description of Christ that was clear, accurate, and rooted in a traditional understanding of the Incarnation. He simply could not concede to Cyril's seemingly brazen description of the Incarnation, especially with what he considered to be a maltreatment of the distinction of natures through Cyril's *communicatio idiomatum*. Against Nestorius, Cyril desired a description of the Incarnation which accentuated the mysterious and audacious nature of the event, and broke new christological ground. He saw Nestorius' trepidation to describe a true union as a failure which had disastrous implications on the salvific role of Christ. While Cyril's version of the Incarnation won the day, the consequences on their confrontation created centuries of conflict and misunderstanding.

[46] Cyril, *Third Letter to Nestorius*, 7.

Scholars are left to wonder what would have happened if Cyril and Nestorius could have reconciled their differences. Most believe that task is simply impossible, while others do the hard work of reading Cyril and Nestorius with fresh eyes as they attempt to wade through centuries of their interpretation. At the very least, both theologians have offered invaluable contributions to christological studies, and an understanding of the Incarnation can be nuanced by both. Additionally, the study of the divine and human uniting in Christ evokes a spirit of ecumenism, which has encouraged others to reevaluate their work with the goal of reconciliation.

Chapter Three

Towards a Reconciliation of the Henosis and Prosopic Christologies

This final chapter will summarize the major points at which Cyril and Nestorius agree and disagree to examine the possibility of any reconciliation. While the scholarly landscape has shifted in the past century of study concerning the christology of Nestorius—many scholars such as Daniel Keating and John McGuckin recognize the nuanced position Nestorius held in light of the discovery of his Bazaar, and no longer consider him to be "strictly Nestorian"—most maintain that Cyril's position demonstrates the longstanding orthodox description of the Incarnation while Nestorius' position falls short. Given the tension created by their writings, scholars continue to conclude that their two positions are irreconcilable. However, some have opened the door to new ways of reading Nestorius and Cyril with the goal of reconciling the Nestorian description with Cyril's "orthodox" description. While this study has demonstrated the disparity of the two christologies, it will end with an attempt to demonstrate the orthodox nature of the Nestorius' description of the Incarnation, and in some harmony with Cyril.

It is worth mentioning that a complete reconciliation of the christologies of Cyril and Nestorius is not possible; as this paper has demonstrated, their discrepancies are significant. However, progress towards reconciliation can be made through the following efforts: 1) If orthodox status[1] can be given to Nestorius' own christology; and 2) If clarity can be brought to their discrepancies to demonstrate their similarities above their differences. If orthodoxy can be viewed on a spectrum, Nestorius and Cyril represent the two boundaries of that spectrum—

[1] The subject of orthodoxy generates an entirely new discussion, as different traditions have different understandings of "orthodoxy." It is more important that Nestorius by recognized as "Chalcedonian" rather than attempt to sort out his orthodox status through various traditions.

Nestorius representing the "Word-man" christology on one end, Cyril representing the "Word-flesh" christology on the others, and the Chalcedonian Definition representing the middle ground.[2]

Disagreements

Before working towards reconciliation, their major disagreements and approaches must be identified. The most noteworthy disagreements are: the starting point of the Incarnation, the subject of the Incarnation, the union within the Incarnation (location), and the economy of that union (nature of union). Cyril begins with the subject of the Divine Logos and moves towards the Incarnation into a human being. In his writings Cyril often begins his description of the Incarnation with one of his favorite texts, John 1:14, writing that "the Word substantially united to himself flesh."[3] Cyril then works towards describing how the Word unites hypostatically with the human nature without destroying, altering, or confusing the two. Because of this, the burden on Cyril is to define the way in which the divine and human *ousiai* remain unconfused (distinct) in the Incarnation.

In contrast, Nestorius worked from the other direction, beginning with the external *prosopon* (observable reality) of Christ to the individual divine and human *ousia*.[4] He recalled that the Evangelists wrote of Christ in ways that demonstrated Christ's divine power and human

[2] The Chalcedonian Definition represents concession from both Alexandria and Antioch. It contains the language of *"Theotokos*" but the most unifying line in the statement is: "One and the Same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten; acknowledged in Two Natures unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the difference of the Natures being in no way removed because of the Union, but rather the properties of each Nature being preserved, and (both) concurring into One Person and One Hypostasis; not as though He were parted or divided into Two Persons, but One and the Self-same Son and Only-begotten God, Word, Lord, Jesus Christ." Notice the language of "two natures" into "One Person" (*prosopon*) and "One Hypostasis," which would have appeased both the moderate Antiochenes and the Alexandrians.

[3] Cyril of Alexandria, *Second Letter to Nestorius*, 3, quoted in Wickham, *Cyril of Alexandria*, 5.

[4] Nestorius, *Bazaar*, 153.

frailty, both in one *prosopon*. Thus, the burden on Nestorius was to demonstrate how the Incarnation exhibited a true union. These burdens caused Cyril and Nestorius to react strongly against one another; Nestorius claiming that Cyril confused the natures of Christ, and Cyril claiming that Nestorius robbed Christ of a true union of divine and human.

Cyril's insistence upon the Logos being the initiation of the Incarnation also contributed to his belief that the Divine Logos was the single subject of the Incarnate Christ. Keating notes that Cyril's central point is that "Christ simply *is* the eternal Word now made flesh for our sake."[5] Cyrilline scholars like Keating and McGuckin argue that it is this fundamental point which caused an irreconcilable conflict between Cyril and Nestorius. Cyril challenged Nestorius to consider that "a single subject christology means a dynamic and intimate union of different conditions in the one life of God."[6] This sort of union was characterized by Cyril's use of a *henosis* of the divine and human *hypostases*. However, Cyril's description poses its own problems. Christ seems to have no human *hypostasis*, only the human nature within the Logos which "*hypostasized*" it in human form.[7] Thus Nestorius argued that this disgraceful confusion actually weakened Jesus' humanity.

While Nestorius agreed that the eternal Word was present in the union, the Logos was "conjoined" (*synapheia*) to human nature, rather than "assumed" as Cyril described it. This led to the "Two Sons" accusation, which has already been weakened. Instead, Nestorius was attempting to describe a complete union which still maintained a distinctness of natures, while

[5] Keating, "Cyril and Nestorius," 84.

[6] McGuckin, *The Christological Controversy*, 192.

[7] Ibid., 170, footnote 88.

emphasizing a personal union of love which manifested itself in the *prosopon* of Jesus Christ.[8] Clearly, Nestorius' primary goal was to avoid any sort of union at the risk of the confusion of natures, but what is not as clear to scholars is the *locus divinitatis* in Nestorius' christology.

Cyril's christology has been described as paradoxical and profoundly mystical, and Nestorius' christology could be described as practical and semantical. Cyril's "hypostatic union" into a single subject freed him to apply the *communicatio idiomatum* between human and divine properties. For Cyril, the communication of attributes was the catalyst by which the Logos conferred salvation upon humanity through divine appropriation and deification. Cyril's paradoxical way of describing the Incarnation accomplished both human salvation and a truly intimate union. However, Nestorius found the concept of *communicatio idiomatum* theologically sloppy and often repugnant.

Where Cyril saw a paradoxical communication, Nestorius saw distinct yet concomitant expressions of two different natures, divine and human. To protect this distinction, Nestorius claimed that "God the Logos raised the dead Lazarus, while the man Jesus wept at the tomb."[9] In this way Nestorius is emphasizing the distinctness, but not to discredit their union, for one Christ did both action. Thus Nestorius and Cyril approached the union and their economy in polar opposites. By denying the communication of attributes, Cyril believed that Nestorius' position inevitably led to two divided Sons, and thus an incomplete union; Nestorius considered Cyril's position as characteristically Theopaschite, or that the Logos was passible and able to suffer in

[8] Interestingly enough, I believe Nestorius' description of "the One Person of Jesus Christ" through a union of love and obedience, rather than nature, would be more welcomed in today's theological landscape. For more interpretations on this Nestorian phrase see: Braaten, "Modern Interpretations," 259-265.

[9] McGuckin, *The Christological Controversy*, 192.

nature.[10] Yet Nestorius' description had its own shortcoming. His desire to separate the natures at a fundamental level had difficult soteriological implications. Cyril considered this division an affront to the very salvific mission of Christ.

Towards Reconciliation

While considerable effort has been made since the discovery of Nestorius' *Bazaar* to demonstrate that he was not "Nestorian," nor was his position unorthodox, there have been fewer attempts to reconcile his view with Cyril's. Having established their presuppositions, clarified their christologies, and summarized their major points of confliction, we are prepared to move towards reconciling the two views. The premise of this attempt is that the views of Cyril and Nestorius are not fundamentally opposed to one another—they both wanted the same thing—however the conflicting metaphors, metaphysical terms, presuppositions, and overall heat of the controversy caused their differences to be blown out of proportion.[11] An attempt at reconciliation is possible, and although Cyril and Nestorius never used quite the same language, they were both trying to say similar things, coming at the Incarnation from opposite ends of orthodoxy. Thus, I will examine the major points of contention described above while rectifying the two views.

First to be reconciled is their perspective of where to begin in describing the Incarnation, either with the Word or with the observable person of the Incarnation. Their opposing starting points betray their presuppositions and reactions against one another. Cyril's primary text and biblical imagery comes from John 1:14, in which the Logos "became" flesh. Cyril's desire to

[10] Paul Gavrilyuk, "*Theopatheia*: Nestorius' Main Charge against Cyril of Alexandria," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 56, no. 2 (2003): 191. This view is also represented by O'Keefe, "Impassible Suffering?" 45; Sellars, *Two Ancient Christologies*, 211-213.

[11] This study has not factored in the political and personal aspects of the conflict, which influenced their discrepancies beyond language, exegetical methods, and philosophical concepts. Scholars have long recognized Cyril's political prowess to be greater than Nestorius', and how this led to Nestorius' downfall; See Henry Chadwick, "Eucharist and Christology in the Nestorian Controversy," *JTS* 2, no. 2 (1951): 145-146.

begin with the Logos and move towards the Incarnation into human form indicates his desire that the Logos fully assumes humanity, so that humanity might be fully restored. In turn, Nestorius begins externally, moving from the *prosopon* of "the man Jesus" observed in Scripture to describe the Incarnation. Based on the premise that the Incarnate Christ was one Person with two conjoined natures, Nestorius indicated that both natures were manifest in the singular person of Jesus Christ. Nestorius' strategy came from both his literal exegetical method and his reaction against the hypostatic union described by Cyril, which to Nestorius seemed to be a comingling of natures. By moving from the external reality (*prosopon*) to the natures of Christ, Nestorius hoped to demonstrate the distinction of the natures while also promoting their union. Ultimately the origination of their views brought them to the *same point* of the Incarnation: the union of the Logos and humanity, which is where the tension continued to build.

The question of the subject of the Incarnation concerns what Cyril meant with his construction "*mia physis* [one nature] of the Incarnate Word." Cyril uses this language to describe the singularity of the Word in Incarnate form. Mark Edwards speaks to the Apollinarist roots of this phrase, which had concerned the Antiochenes, as the divine nature of the Logos seems to completely consume the human nature, leaving only one (divine) nature.[12] And yet Cyril clearly differentiated from the human and divine natures in the one subject of the Word through his description of the hypostatic union. Keating notes that Cyril uses this formula to express the single subject of the Incarnate Christ while distinguishing between the hypostasis of the Word and the full human and divine natures which are united in the Word.[13] Thus Cyril's description emphasizes the union within the subject of the Word, which assumes the fullness of

[12] Edwards, "One Nature of the Word Enfleshed," 298.

[13] Keating, "Cyril and Nestorius," 86.

humanity in order to restore it. From the other perspective, Nestorius and the Antiochenes sought to emphasize the two different natures within the single *prosopon* of Christ. Nestorius writes, "God the Logos was made man that He might therein make the humanity the likeness of God."[14] Clearly, Nestorius also claimed the Logos as the subject of the Incarnation; only his description allowed for a union that differentiated between the divine and human natures without a mere facsimile of a union. It is this conjoined union which allows Christ to be the moral mediator (High Priest) who redeems humanity. While Cyril's description emphasized a single subject of the Logos which contained the fullness of humanity and divinity by means of their hypostatic union, Nestorius described a conjoined subject (one from two) which was singular in their shared *prosopon*. Here we see both theologians making the effort to demonstrate one Incarnate Word, who possesses the fullness of human and divine natures, Cyril's with a christology which affirms the divine Logos, and Nestorius with a christology which affirms the presence of Christ's humanity.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of their christologies to rectify, and thus requiring the most attention, is the union of the Incarnation. Two major issues regarding the union of natures require reconciliation: first concerning the location of the union, and second concerning the economy (or nature) of the union. The terms *hypostasis* and *prosopon* are relevant regarding the location of the union. Cyril proposed a union of natures in the *hypostasis* of Christ. A union in the single *hypostasis* of Christ promoted Cyril's desire for a single subject of the Logos in Christ Jesus. McGuckin describes Cyril's thought succinctly:

> Cyril also applied [*hypostasis*] to denote the manner of the christological union: it was a hypostatic union (henosis kath' hypostasin), [*sic*] that is one that was based and founded on the singleness of hypostasis [*sic*]. This means that, for Cyril the union of two distinct

[14] Nestorius, *Bazaar*, 212.

> levels of reality, Godhead and manhood, takes place dynamically because there is only one individual subject presiding over both, the one person of the incarnate deity.[15]

Thus, for Cyril, a hypostatic union accomplished two things: 1) a true union of two natures, divine and human, in a single personal subject who is both at the same time; and 2) a real union and concrete event, or substantive reality, not a theoretical union. It was this union which prevented falling into "Two Sons" and affected the salvation of humanity through the assumption of the flesh by the divine Word. Cyril also explained that full humanity and divinity were present within the one *hypostasis* of the Incarnate Word, preserving the fullness of both natures. In short, Cyril's placement of the union at a deeper metaphysical reality demonstrated an effort towards a true union through a single subject after the union.

The location of Nestorius' union began from a more functional approach (as opposed to metaphysical), based on what he saw in Scripture and his underlying assumptions about metaphysics. Nestorius reacted against Cyril's use of "hypostatic union" because he believed it inevitably led to the confusion or intermingling of divine and human *ousiai*. He writes of Cyril, "But this (kind of union) is corruptible and passible; but a union of natures into a person [*prosopon*] is impassible and incorruptible; for it comes by free appropriation—for the union is not involuntary—by condescension and exaltation, by authority and obedience."[16] For Nestorius a union in the *prosopon* of Christ accomplished the distinction of natures necessary to preserve the Logos as divine and the man as human. However, Nestorius also believed that a *prosopon* without an *ousia* was unheard of, so his understanding of *prosopon* was not in mere appearance,

[15] McGuckin, *The Christological Controversy*, 212.

[16] Nestorius, *Bazaar*, 163, quoted in Bethune-Baker, *Nestorius and His Teaching*, 186.

but the representation of "a real element in the being of a thing."[17] This means that the *prosopon* of each of the human and divine natures represented the fullness of each. He demonstrates this by writing that "in Christ—all the [properties] of God the Word whose nature is impassible and is immortal and eternal and all the [properties] of the humanity, which are a nature mortal and passible and created, and those of the union of the incarnation . . . are referred to one prosopon, to that common prosopon of our Lord Jesus Christ."[18] By locating the union in the *prosopon* of Christ, Nestorius was attempting to articulate a union that maintained the distinction of natures, while representing a true union through the singular person of Christ (both physical/external and metaphysical in personhood). One could argue whether Cyril and Nestorius were attempting to describe the same metaphysical concept while using two different metaphysical terms, both misunderstanding the other.[19]

Now, we consider how Cyril and Nestorius viewed the economy of the union through the terms *henosis* and *synapheia* respectively, as well as the metaphors each used. For Cyril, *henosis* was the only term to describe a full and proper union in the Incarnation. To describe this union, Cyril most commonly used the metaphor of the union of the body and soul in a person. He states that while both share a distinctness (the souls is, by nature, not the body, and *vice versa*) when the soul is united to the body it creates a new condition, a "single reality by means of their dynamic interpenetration."[20] Cyril believed this analogy demonstrated his christological principle: a union of two things discrete in regards to their respective natures could create a new

[17] Hodgson, "Metaphysics of Nestorius," 49.

[18] Nestorius, *Bazaar*, 171.

[19] This is what Bethune-Baker hints at in *Nestorius and His Teaching*, 171ff.

[20] McGuckin, *The Christological Controversy*, 199.

condition wherein the two were united and yet their union did not destroy the integrity of their original natures. Any action performed by Christ was both divine and human, as the Logos was the single subject of the enfleshed person. While Nestorius accused such a description as being a mixing or co-mingling, Cyril expanded christological thought beyond the *mixis* concept of his Alexandrine forefathers, Athanasius and Origen, through his *henosis* theory of hypostatic union.

To avoid Cyril's mixture language, Nestorius used the word *synapheia* to describe the union of divine and human. He preferred language and metaphors which expressed an intimate indwelling, which he identified in Scripture. He likened the Logos to the High Priest who dwells within the Temple (human). In one of his surviving sermons he writes, "While we keep distinct the properties of the natures, let us conjoin the dignity of the union. Let us not say that God the Word is the temple, but rather its inhabitant; let us not imagine that the temple is He who inhabits it, but rather that which is inhabited."[21] Here, and through his exegesis of the Gospels, Nestorius differentiates between the two natures, while uniting them in the Temple, not too dissimilar from Cyril's soul-body metaphor. Nestorius felt comfortable attributing some acts as emanating from Christ's divine nature, and some from his human nature, because they were the acts of one Christ and Lord, not two, and both natures were exercised within one united person. McGuckin notes that Nestorius' union by *synapheia* was based on mutual love, rather than the necessities of nature.[22]

How can there be movement towards reconciliation in both the location and the economy of the union described by Cyril and Nestorius? By examining the weakness of each and

[21] This sermon survived because it was originally attributed to Chrysostom but was later discovered to be given by Nestorius. As quoted in, Bethune-Baker, *Nestorius and His Teaching*, 113-114.

[22] McGuckin, *The Christological Controversy*, 162.

recognizing the commonality of their pursuit, we can begin to see that there is some hope for reconciliation. Regarding both the location and economy of the union, clearly Cyril produces stronger language by placing the union within the *hypostasis* and through his usage of *henosis* to describe the union. The intimacy he saw between the two natures in Christ was epitomized in the *communicatio idiomatum*. However, as Nestorius demonstrated in his critique of Cyril, this description often led to what seemed to be a confusion of natures (to the point of corruption) and to himself being accused as a theopaschite. A danger of Cyril's description of the union was that such an intimate union of "from two [natures], [to] one" seems to imply that after the union only one nature seems to exist, and that the divine nature negates or destroys the human nature.[23]

Nestorius used weaker union language to preserve the distinction of the natures, and his effort bore witness to the holiness of God. While Nestorius taught that Christ was one, he attributed the divine acts of Christ to his divine nature, and human acts to his human nature. This caused Cyril to question the legitimacy of Nestorius' description of a true union. His position exhibited its own dangers: if the nature of the Word performs the miracles, and the nature of the human performs that which is human, then one nature is constantly overpowering the other. The two natures seem to co-exist inside one person, rather than being united.[24] However, the weaknesses of both theologians can be strengthened by the position of the other: Cyril's position could have been better balanced by the terminological accuracy of Nestorius, and a willingness to audaciously embrace the mystery of the union could have also strengthened Nestorius' position.

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[23] Mark Nestlehutt, "Chalcedonian Christology: Modern Criticism and Contemporary Ecumenism," *JES* 35:2 (Spring 1998): 188.

[24] Ibid.

Two points of agreement bring both theologians towards reconciliation. The first is that they both sought to describe a *true and genuine* union. While scholars still disagree if either accomplished such a description, it has been clearly demonstrated that each intended to do so. Cyril's union accentuates the audacious and radical nature of this union, by describing a union through assumption, or the Logos "becoming" flesh. His position is succinctly described by this statement: "We say, rather, that the Word, in an ineffable and incomprehensible manner, ineffably united to himself flesh animated with a rational soul, and thus became man and was called the Son of Man." [25] In another way, Nestorius describe a true union of love, volition, and obedience. His position is that: "[Christ] is the subject of the two natures which are separated in essence, but united by love, and in one and the same prosopon."[26] Both desired a genuine union and describe it in ways allowed by their presuppositional boundaries. Cyril's approach describes an intimate union of natures, while Nestorius describes the union through a beautiful understanding of love and obedient self-limitation.

Secondly, both desired to describe a union which still maintained a *true distinction of natures* such that neither was corrupted or altered at their most fundamental level. In this respect Nestorius showed the most care in his position. In one instance he writes, "I praise the distinction of natures according to the definition of humanity and divinity, and the conjunction of them into one person, and not saying that God the Word had need of a second begetting from a woman, and the profession that the divinity does not admit of suffering."[27] Nestorius believed that a true union could still be accomplished while maintaining a true distinction of the natures, which he

[25] Cyril, *Second Letter*, 3, quoted in McGuckin, *The Christological Controversy*, 263.

[26] Nestorius, *Bazaar*, 81.

[27] Nestorius, *Second Letter to Cyril*, 6, quoted in McEnerney, *Letters 1-50*, 45.

described through his use of *synapheia* to describe a union-yet-distinction concept. Cyril found agreement in the need to maintain true distinction, to avoid the heretical language of Apollinaris. He believed his description did not confuse the natures. He wrote, "While the natures that were brought together into this very true unity were different, nonetheless there is One Christ and Son from out of both. This did not involve the negation of the difference of natures."[28] Cyril expressed this distinction through his avoidance of *mixis* language and by maintaining a distinction within the hypostasis of Christ. Clearly, both believed their description of the union maintained an appropriate distinction in natures, and both exhibit considerable effort to illustrate a true union of distinct natures.

Complete reconciliation of their two views is, most likely, impossible. This has been demonstrated in numerous ways, rooted in their presuppositions, their exegetical methods and biblical metaphors, and their language to describe the Incarnation. However, it is evident that genuine efforts can be made towards reconciling the two views and their constituents, by centering the conversation around the question of orthodoxy. If Cyril and Nestorius represent the "edges of orthodoxy" concerning the Incarnation of the Word, then each can maintain their distinction while being reconciled in their common goal of an orthodox description of the Incarnation. Nestorius represents the conservative and technically precise edge, which preserves the distinctness of the natures and describes a union of love and obedience. Cyril represents the progressive and mystical edge, which develops a moral union of human and divine natures seeking the restoration of humanity. Each position should be considered the boundaries of orthodoxy, with the *Formula of Reunion* (433) and the *Chalcedonian Definition* (451) forming the middle ground. While the two theologians describe the Incarnation in different ways, both

[28] Cyril, *Second Letter*, 3, quoted in McGuckin, *The Christological Controversy*, 263.

should be considered orthodox descriptions, and thus the form these “edges,” safeguarding our understanding of the Incarnation in the tradition of the Church. From this perspective, the legacies of Cyril and Nestorius can rest, not in controversy and scandal, but as champions of the edges of an orthodox description of the Incarnation.

Conclusion

Is reconciliation between Cyril and Nestorius possible? The goal of this prolegomenon has been to set the foundation for further study to continue the work of reconciliation. The conclusion of this thesis is that while Cyril and Nestorius may have not ever been able to agree fully, the two should still be considered orthodox on their own terms. History eventually began to lean towards their reconciliation, found in both the *Formula of Reunion* and at the next major Council of Chalcedon. The heart of the *Formula* reads:

> We confess, then, our lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God perfect God and perfect man of a rational soul and a body, begotten before all ages from the Father in his godhead, the same in the last days, for us and for our salvation, born of Mary the virgin, according to his humanity, one and the same consubstantial with the Father in godhead and consubstantial with us in humanity, for a union of two natures took place. Therefore we confess one Christ, one Son, one Lord. According to this understanding of the unconfused union, we confess the holy virgin to be the mother of God because God the Word took flesh and became man and from his very conception united to himself the temple he took from her.[1]

One can notice elements of both Cyril and Nestorius in the passage above. For Cyril, it incorporates the theotokos title while also working in strong union language. For Nestorius, it maintains an effort to avoid confusion the natures in the union, while also drawing on his Temple metaphor to describe the union. Theologians would, for the next 1,500 years, continue to debate and critique the positions offered by Nestorius and Cyril, opening doors to more nuanced understandings of each.

[1] E. Schwartz, *ACO*, I, 1, no. 123, 8. English translation in Graham Gould, "Cyril of Alexandria and the Formula of Reunion," *The Downside Review* 106, no. 365 (October 1988): 235-236.

When Nestorius was defeated he was banished, and his writings burned. When Cyril died, one of his Antiochene rivals wrote, "At last with a final struggle the villain is dead."[2] The christological conflict which ended in such animosity has since seen centuries of healing. The scope of this study was limited to the christologies of Cyril and Nestorius, factors influencing their presuppositions, and their disagreements and points of agreement. The goal throughout has been to study their christologies to determine whether reconciliation might be possible or worthwhile. However, this study has only scratched the surface, and it would profit from more study of the political, ecclesial, and social factors which contributed to the thought-divide between the two theologians. Further study is needed in a few areas. Most helpful would be greater access to English translations of their texts, which requires ongoing translation work. Secondly, a comparative analysis demonstrating direct quotes from Cyril and Nestorius, containing points of contrast and agreement, would shed more light on the effort of reconciliation. Finally, scholars must continue to work of peeling back the layers of political rivalries to expose the barebones of each christology. Doing so has already brought success in at least a "partial" restoration of Nestorius, which can lead to greater unity.

One could ask the next question: Do Cyril and Nestorius *need* to be reconciled? I would argue that it is a worthwhile effort, because rejecting one side over the other creates an incomplete portrait of the person of Christ, and because even the various traditions of the Church have come to different "answers" to the problem of Incarnation. Continued study of Cyril and Nestorius, and how they have been misunderstood, can lead to greater ecclesial reconciliation as well. R.V. Sellers offers two more reasons that reconciliation is both possible and valuable. First, he argues that "though [Alexandria and Antioch] approach these subjects from different angles,

[2] Attributed to Theodoret of Cyr. Found in *PG*, vol. 83, ep. 180.

they see the vital connection between the doctrine of Christ's Person and that of His redemptive work, and establish their Christology upon definite soteriological principles."[3] Thus, the reconciliation of this doctrine also contributes to soteriological questions. Secondly, and most important for this study, he concludes that the christologies of Cyril and Nestorius, while being different, are necessary because "one is the complement of the other."[4]

There is something to appreciate in both of christologies. Cyril fought to uphold the mysteriously paradoxical union of God and humanity, in a way in which the Logos empties himself so that humanity may be filled with the divine presence of God. His "hypostatic union" which allowed for the communication of properties was groundbreaking work, both christologically and soteriologically. Likewise, Nestorius was careful to preserve God as transcendent and "Other," and yet Who chose to become emptied, and joined in a union of love and obedience to redeem humanity. When seen together—rather than in opposition—the two provide a fuller glimpse into the person of Jesus Christ.

After the *Formula of Reunion* was published, Cyril wrote these words to John of Antioch, who had been a friend and advocate of Nestorius during his deposition. This excerpt serves as a fitting end to this work:

> "Let the heavens rejoice and the earth be glad" (Ps. 95:11; Eph. 2:14) for the dividing wall of partition is broken down, and sorrow has ended, and the cause of all dissension has been removed. Christ the Saviour of us all has granted to his churches the prize of peace… For we held in mind what the Saviour said: "My peace I give to you; my peace I leave with you" (Jn. 14:27). And we were always taught to say in our prayers: "O Lord our God, give us peace, for you have given us all things" (Is. 26:12). So, if anyone participates in the peace that God provides, he will be lacking in no good.[5]

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[3] Sellers, *Two Ancient Christologies*, 245.

[4] Ibid., 257.

[5] Cyril of Alexandria, *Letter of John of Antioch*, 1-2. Found in *PG*, vol. 77, ep. 39, 173-182.

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**Denotes sources that were consulted but not directly used in this study.*