

## **The Alexandrian and Antiochian Christological Thoughts<sup>1</sup>**

Many scholars attribute the problem of the Christological formula concerning the nature of Christ "Mia-physis and Dyophysis" to the controversy between the Alexandrian and the Antiochian theology. While the Alexandrian school adopted the "hypostasis union" or the "nature union" of the Godhead and manhood to assert the oneness of Jesus Christ, the Antiochian School accepted the "indwelling theology", that is, the Godhead dwells in manhood, as if Jesus Christ were two persons in one, to assert that no confusion had occurred between the Godhead and manhood, and to avoid attributing human weakness to His divinity. The starting point of the Alexandrian School was John 1:14 "And the Word became flesh", while that of the Antiochian was Colossians 2:9 "For in Him dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily".

Before discussing the differences between the two Schools, I would refer to the following remarks:

1. Usually scholars speak of the controversy between the two schools, ignoring that they agreed on many points. Every school had its own aspects but was not isolated from the other.
2. The problem issued not from the two schools, but from those who misinterpreted these Schools' concepts or formulas, like Apollinarius, Eutyches, Diodore, Nestorius, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyrus, and Ibas of Edessa. It is noteworthy that Apollinarius of Laodicea and Eutyches of Constantinople who accepted the Alexandrian formula "Mia-physis" were not Alexandrian, nor had they the Alexandrian system of theology.
3. The imperial and church politics played their role in this controversy to create a huge gap between the leaders of these schools, which ended by the serious split that occurred within the Church from the fifth Church.

### **The Alexandrian Hypostasis Union**

St. Cyril, in his struggle against Nestorius explained the "hypostasis union" as a "personal union", "natural union" and "real unification". The Word of God united our nature to Himself and made it His own, that is, in Him is effected a real unification of Godhead and manhood. In other words this theory does not ignore the difference of natures, but it insisted on the oneness of Christ by declaring His one incarnate nature of two, without confusion of natures or separation. It conserves at least two ideas<sup>2</sup>:

1. The Logos, an eternal hypostasis, united to Himself manhood, which has not its existence before incarnation and is not separate from the Godhead. It became individuated, thereby receiving its hypostatic status in union with the Logos. Manhood was not an independent hypostasis over and against the Logos, it is hypostatic in the union.
2. The union of the natures was inward and real. For "hypostasis" is the entire "ousia" which has come into concrete existence, while "prosopone union" signifies the external aspect of the object or person, whereby one hypostasis of a class is distinguished from another.

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<sup>1</sup> Fr. Malaty: *The Terms Physis & Hypostasis in the Early Church, Alexandria 1987*, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> V.C. Samuel: *The Council of Chalcedon Re-examined, Madras 1977*, p. 249f.

St. Cyril rejected the Antiochian theory of "indwelling", that is, the Godhead of Christ dwelt in His manhood, or the theory of "conjunction" or "close participation" as insufficient to reveal the real unification, but permits the division of natures of Christ as Nestorius taught.

### **The Antiochian Dyophysis (Two Natures)**

The Antiochian leaders treated the "hypostatic" union of Cyril with suspicion, as if it were Apollinarian. They adopted the theory of the indwelling of the Logos in the manhood, to assert Christ's manhood and to confirm Him as a real and perfect man. Nestorius declared this theory when he refused to call St. Mary "Theotokos", and rejected the Alexandrian statement: "the Son of God died".

Apollinarius of Laodicea used the Alexandrian formula "one nature" in his own theological system. In his eagerness to defend the Church faith against Arianism he believed that the Logos was united only with the corporeality of man and replaced the soul. In other words, as the Arians could not accept the Godhead of Christ, because it made Him of two persons: God and man, Apollinarius states that Christ has no human soul, believing that thus he asserts the hypostatic union. He believed that the manhood of Christ is incomplete.

It seems to the Antiochians that hypostatic union has this result, i.e., the humanity of Christ is incomplete. They used to attribute Apollinarianism to the great fathers of Alexandria, such as St. Athanasius and St. Cyril.

The reaction is their adoption to the "Dyophysis" theory to assert three facts in the incarnation:

1. The manhood of Christ was real and perfect.
2. There was no confusion between the natures of Christ.
3. The Godhead is impassible, God did not suffer, nor did He die.

These facts are assured by the true Alexandrian fathers, but not by Eutyches and Apollinarius who were truly not Alexandrian.

### **The Antiochian Dyophysis and the Separation of natures**

Frances Young states, "The principal representatives of Antiochene theology were Diodore of Tarsus, the teacher of John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia and Theodoret of Cyrillus, the friend and defender of Nestorius. The reputation of all three has suffered through association with Nestorianism, but there has been a reassessment in modern times, not least of the theology of Nestorius himself<sup>3</sup>."

Sellers who defend the Antiochene Christology saying that they speak of a "complete union", and insist that it is one which is altogether indivisible<sup>4</sup>, states<sup>5</sup> that they refer to the Godhead and manhood not only as "natures" and "ousiai" (essences) but also as hypostases (substantiae) and that there is no hypostasis without its prosopon, (both the Godhead and manhood i.e. Christ are seen each with its prosopon - each that is, as possessing its "appearance", its "individuality", and its "person").

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<sup>3</sup> The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology, 1983, p.28.

<sup>4</sup> Sellers: The Council of Chalcedon SPCK 1961, p. 171.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid 176.

## **The "Indwelling" Theory and the Historic-gramatical method of Exegesis**

The Antiochians adopted the theory of "indwelling" not just as a contrast to the Alexandrian theology of the hypostatic union, but in harmony with their interest in the historic gramatical method of the exegesis of the Holy Scriptures. Meyedorff says: The rigorist critical approach of men like Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Theodoret led them to study the Gospel text literally in order to describe the history of our salvation rather than to explain it. Since they maintained a literal interpretation of the Old Testament, the Antiochenes tended, in their exegesis of the Gospels and Epistles to take chiefly into consideration the historical Jesus, the aim and the end of the history of Israel, in the full reality of his human nature<sup>6</sup>. In other words, their interest in the literal interpretation of the holy Scripture incited them to assert the reality of the historical Jesus in His "human nature" independent of the divine Logos, who dwells in him (according to their expression).

## **The Characteristics of the Antiochian Theology**

1. The historic - grammatical method of exegesis the Holy Scriptures.
2. The Dyophysis (Two natures) of Christ.
3. Man's creatureliness: Many scholars see the core of Alexandrian theology as Deification or the grace of renewal<sup>7</sup>. By deification the Alexandrians mean the renewal of human nature as a whole, to attain sharing in the characteristics of our Lord Jesus Christ in place of the corrupt human nature, or as the apostles state that the believer may enjoy "the partaking in the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4), or the new man in the image of His creator (Col. 3:10). The core of the Alexandrian theology can be revealed through St. Athanasius' statement that the Word of God became man (enethraposen) so that we might be made gods (theopiethomen). Some scholars state that this theology is a natural result of practising severe asceticism by the Alexandrian theologians. They ignored actual life on earth to participate in divine life. In other words, they abolished the boundries between God and man, concentrating on what is divine even in their daily life.

Although the Alexandrian theologians were ascetics, they did not despise their own bodies, nor deny our Lord's manhood, but they concentrated on the soteriological aspect. Even in their apologetic works they concentrate on the work of Christ as the Redeemer of the world.

Their asceticism was biblical; it did not hate the body, nor denied human free-will, nor despised earthly life with its properties. It is noteworthy that even the Egyptian hermits considered extreme ascetic practices evil, in the same way as luxury.

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<sup>6</sup> Christ in the Eastern Christian Thought, 1969, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup>The author: *School of Alexandria*, 1994, p. 15.

The Antiochenes, as Sellers states, (are supremely interested in man the moral being, and in particular concentrated on his power of self-determination<sup>8</sup>.)

Sellers also says: (They may be called anthropologists, but their anthropology is intimately associated with their ethical and soteriological ideas<sup>9</sup>.)

This attitude had its effect in adopting their theology of "dyaphyseis". Sellers says: (We must notice that, fundamental to the thought of the Antiochenes, is the doctrine of the essential difference between God the Creator and man the creature ... When they refer to the divine and human ousiai (essences), they seem to set God in his eternity and man in his transience as complete opposites ... All that exists can be divided into what is uncreated and what is created ... This thought, as should be understood, lies at the very heart of the teaching of the Antiochenes, and is the ultimate ground of their insistence on the "two natures" in Jesus Christ, and the necessity of "dividing" and separating them<sup>10</sup>.)

Green also deals with this idea, as he says: (The notion of man as a creature with a free, rational and mutable soul. Salvation was still thought of in terms of immortality and immutability, but this destiny was only possible provided man exercised his freedom of choice ... The natural (hypostatic) union, first of all, meant a loss of human freedom. The divinity, according to Nestorius' rendering of Cyril's views, acted as a "Deus ex machina" in Christ. There was no experience of freedom in the life of our Lord, God manipulated it all ... if the union were described as natural, then it has nothing to do with Christ's human will and freedom. Nestorius claims that the tendency of this Alexandrian way of thought is to deny the humanity of our Lord. Like Apollinarus, Cyril runs the risk of denying autonomy or reality to the will and soul of Christ, and substituting for the exercise of these human faculties the automatic role of the divinity ... Nestorius firmly states that the divine nature and the human nature in Christ are separate and autonomous<sup>11</sup>.)

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<sup>8</sup> Sellers, p. 253.

<sup>9</sup> Sellers, p. 164

<sup>10</sup> Sellers p. 162-4.

<sup>11</sup> R. Green: *Theodore of Mopseustia*, 1961, p. 25, 38.