

SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY

NESTORIANISM

TH-A 521-01 SURVEY OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY

FR. KENNETH B. STEINHAUSER

DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY

BY

FRANCIS X. GUMERLOCK

SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI

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INTRODUCTION

Nestorianism is an unsatisfactory, heterodox answer to the Christological question of how Christ's divinity and humanity unite in one acting subject. Named after Nestorius (d. 451), an early fifth-century bishop of Constantinople, Nestorianism is that Christological error which so separates the two natures of Christ, divine and human, that it posits two distinct persons.

After briefly treating the context in which Nestorianism arose and giving a short overview of the life and character of Nestorius, I shall describe his controversy with Cyril of Alexandria, which resulted in his excommunication at an ecumenical council. I shall then list a few of Nestorius' main Christological tenets, and the explication of orthodox Christology in response to them. Finally, I shall discuss the survival of Nestorianism in lands east of the Roman Empire through the middle ages and into the modern period.

THE CONTEXT IN WHICH NESTORIANISM AROSE

One of the major issues of theology over which the early Church struggled for understanding was the issue of the founder of Christianity, the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. During the first and second centuries, the early Christian communities strongly asserted the full humanity of Jesus. Against various gnostic groups which denied the true humanity of Christ, they realized that that the very basis of their salvation was the incarnation of Christ and His death upon the cross. In the fourth century the Church asserted the full divinity of Christ in reaction to Arius. But how these two truths, the full

humanity and the full deity of Christ, meet in one person, was one of the major theological issues of the fifth and sixth centuries.

The Alexandrian school of thought emphasized the deity of Christ, but seemed weak on the humanity of Christ. For example, in the decades before the Nestorian controversy, Apollinaris of Laodicea (d. 390) asserted the full deity of Christ but said that the Word took the place of the human soul of Jesus. On the other hand the Antiochene school was strong on the humanity of Christ. From this school, Paul of Samosota (d. after 268) had been condemned for the “adoptionist” heresy, which saw Christ as a man who at a specific point was adopted by the Father as the Son of God. Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 429), also from the Antiochene school, often portrayed Jesus as “the assumed Man.” Theologically, Nestorius was a disciple of Theodore of Mopsuestia. Upon investigation of their extant writings, the Christologies of each are very similar.

This was also a time of bitter rivalries between the sees of Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch. At the same time, all three were jealous of the prominence that the see of Constantinople was gaining now that it had become the new capital of the Empire.

THE CHARACTER OF NESTORIUS AND CYRIL

Nestorius. Born in Germanicia near Mount Taurus in Syria, Nestorius joined the monastery of Euprepus near Antioch. He later became a presbyter in Antioch and gained distinction for good preaching and his austerity of life. He rose to prominence when Sisinnius, the bishop of Constantinople, died in December 427. In April 428 Nestorius was appointed to the vacant see.

As I mentioned above, the Christological background in which he was trained very much emphasized the humanity of Christ. Such emphasis on Christ's obedience, indwelling by the Holy Spirit, and exaltation in reward for obedience, was, in part, a reaction against Apollinarianism and the tendency among many to emphasize the deity of Christ at the expense of His true humanity.

Nestorius, far from angelic in personality, was described by one contemporary as intellectually proud, totally lacking in tact, ignorant of any theological position except his own, and one who didn't know when to stop talking. We know that the first thing he did in office was to persuade the Emperor to use harsher measures upon heretical assemblies, perhaps revealing a little about his personality with respect to toleration.

Cyril, bishop of Alexandria, seems to have been no angel either. In ambition, he seems to have equaled his uncle Theophilus, who just a few decades earlier had successfully campaigned for the expulsion and exile of the bishop of Constantinople, John Chrysostom. It has been suggested that Cyril's motives for starting a theological war with Nestorius were far from pure, and included things such as desire to divert accusations against himself and eagerness to establish the ascendancy of his see over the sees of Antioch and Constantinople.

There is evidence that Cyril lavished expensive presents (bribes?) on the empress and many of the chamberlains in the imperial household in Constantinople in order to win them to his side against Nestorius. G.T. Stokes writes,

He lavished bribes right and left, in order to gain powerful court officials to his side. His course of proceedings is disclosed to us by a letter of his archdeacon and syncellus Epiphanius... This letter was addressed to Maximianus, the patriarch of Constantinople, appointed, instead of Nestorius, in October 431.... Epiphanius tells the patriarch that Cyril had written to the empress Pulcheria, and to her influential chamberlains, and bribes, or, as he more elegantly puts it, present had been sent to such as were worthy of them. An attempt had been made to gain over one of the chief chamberlains, Chrysoretos, who was hostile by sending him magnificent presents "ut tandem desisteret ab oppugnatione ecclesiae." The patriarch was requested to use her influence with the

palace officials. The patriarch was to give these officials whatever their avarice demanded.... Appended to the letter was a list of the persons to whom bribes had been sent from Alexandria....The clergy and church of Alexandria even mourned over the poverty brought upon them by the excessive expenditures incurred.¹

It was also said that upon Cyril's death, someone told the guild of undertakers to make sure they put a very big tombstone on top of his grave to ensure that he won't come up and bother people anymore.

THE NESTORIAN CONTROVERSY

Nestorius had brought with him to Constantinople a fellow priest from Antioch named Anastasius. Not long after they were in the imperial capital, Anastasius preached in the presence of Nestorius that people should not call Mary "theotokos" or God-bearer, because Mary was a woman, and it is impossible that God should be born of a woman. This created quite a sensation, but Nestorius followed it up with several sermons maintaining the same view.

Report about these things found its way rapidly to Alexandria and a lively but bitter correspondence between Cyril and Nestorius was underway. According to Cyril, Nestorius' strict separation of the manhood and Godhood in Christ implied that there were two Sons of God. To Nestorius, the uniting of the two natures of Christ in one hypostasis (person) implied a change in God, and that was unthinkable.

Through correspondence, both Nestorius and Cyril tried to secure Pope Celestine on his side. Upon review of the matter, the bishop of Rome decided that Cyril's view represented the orthodox understanding about Christ. He wrote to Nestorius, telling him

¹ G.T.Stokes, "Nestorianism," in William Smith and Henry Waces, eds., *A Dictionary of Christian*

that his views were blasphemous. The Pope eventually called a council in Rome (August 430) which excommunicated Nestorius. Cyril followed suit with a synod in Alexandria, drew up a list of twelve anathemas upon his understanding of Nestorius' teaching, and sent it to the Emperor in Constantinople. Nestorius replied to Cyril with counter-anathemas. Wanting to see the matter resolved, the Emperor summoned a general council that met in Ephesus in 431.

Cyril arrived very early to the council, and brought with him many representatives so that it was stacked in his favor. Then, after winning the favor of the bishop and monks in Ephesus, he appointed himself president, chief accuser, and representative of the Pope, and started the council before other bishops arrived. Nestorius did not even attend the council. The Council determined that Nestorius should be "stripped of his episcopal dignity and removed from the college of priests."²

In 431, Nestorius was relegated to the monastery of Euprepus near Antioch. Four years later even stronger measures against Nestorius were taken. He was exiled first to Petra in Arabia, and then to upper Egypt. His books were burned publicly, and republication or preservation of them was made a punishable offense. In addition, the imperial edict stated that "persons everywhere sharing Nestorius' nefarious opinion should be called Simonians" and were deprived of all right of assembly.³

In the years following the Council of Ephesus, other luminaries wrote against Nestorianism, including John Cassian and Pope Leo. After Cyril's death in 444, controversy over the manner in which the two natures of Christ are united broke out

Biography, Liturgature, Sects and Doctrines (London: John Murray, 1887), 30-31.

² Norman Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*. Vol. 1 (Georgetown Univ. Press, 1990), 62.

³ The "General Law of Theodosius II and Valentinian III on Nestorianism, 435" in P.R. Coleman-Norton, *Roman State and Christian Church: A Collection of Legal Documents to A.D. 535*, Vol. 2 (London:

between Theodoret of Cyrrhus representing the Antiochene school and Dioscorus, the new patriarch of Alexandria. This led up to the Council of Chalcedon held in 451.

Pope Leo's *Tome* was very influential in the development of the Christological orthodoxy in the symbol of this council, which once again condemned Nestorianism along with an "opposite" heresy named after Eutyches. While the Nestorians were strong on the full properties of Christ's two natures but weak on the unity of His person, the Eutychians or Monophysites (who claimed to represent the opinions of Cyril) so emphasized the unity of Christ's person, that they held to only one nature in Christ not two. The term monophysite means an adherent of the doctrine of "one nature."

THE CHRISTOLOGY OF NESTORIUS

In recent scholarship there is a tendency to portray Nestorius as one who was defamed unjustly, and that he really didn't believe the things his opponents attributed to him. Although Nestorius insisted that he did not hold to "two Sons" (this seems to have been more an implication from his teaching created by his opponents), I still find his Christological views to be faulty. To show this more cogently, the quotes and statements in this section are gathered exclusively from the writings of Nestorius himself or from "Nestorian" Christians after him, not from his opponents.

Christotokos. The term "theotokos," God-bearer or mother of God, was more a statement about Christ than about His mother Mary. While the orthodox said that since Christ is God, Mary can rightly called the Mother of God, Nestorius and his followers

S.P.C.K., 1966), 700-701. They were called Simonians after Simon Magus (Acts 8:9-24) who, in the heresiology of the time, was believed to be the father of all heresies.

rejected the term. “Does God have a mother?” Nestorius preached. “A Greek without reproach introducing mothers for the gods! Is Paul a liar when he says of the deity of Christ, ‘without father, without mother, without genealogy’ [Heb. 7:3]? Mary, my friend, did not give birth to the Godhead (for ‘what is born of the flesh is flesh’ [John 3:6]) A creature did not produce him who is uncreatable.”⁴ “I could not give the name of God to one who was two or three months old.”⁵

Scriptural support which the Nestorians used for their rejection of the term theotokos, include passages like: “Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary from whom was born Jesus who is called Christ” (Matt. 1:16). “And the mother of Jesus was there” (John 2:1). “And with Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren” (Acts 1:14).

Instead of theotokos, Nestorius thought that “Christotokos,” or Christ-bearer, was more appropriate, believing that “Christ” was the title used by the apostles to indicate both of His natures.

Two hypostases. Nestorius was concerned that if the two natures of Christ are joined in one hypostasis, it implies a change in “ousia” on the part of God. He believed that a hypostatic union makes God passible, and co-mingles the two natures. He wrote,

The union is not to be conceived of as a change of ousia—either into another ousia or unto a physical compounding into a single nature. . . . For a physical union implies the passible and changeable. . . . The union was not one of natures into a single nature, nor a confusion, nor a change, nor a changing of ousia—whether of God into man, or of man into God—nor a mingling of natures, nor a compounding into one nature, so that they should be mingled. . . . Now all these things they [his opponents] make void by a union of nature and of hypostasis. . . . These persons do not blush to attribute these things to the Divine nature by means of a union of physical hypostasis—God suffering the passions of the body which is physically united, thirsting and hungering and being needy and anxious. . . . All these men will make void the proper things of God the Word also, and make them human”⁶

⁴ Nestorius, *First Sermon Against the Theotokos*, in Richard A. Norris, ed. and trans., *The Christological Controversy* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1980), 123-131, at 124.

⁵ This saying, reportedly said to Theodotus, bishop of Ancrya in Galatia, is recorded in Socrates’ *Ecclesiastical History* VII. 34. Quoted in J.F. Bethune-Baker, *Nestorius and his Teaching* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1908), 69.

⁶ Quoted in Bethune-Baker, *Nestorius and his Teaching*, 153, 155-156.

Nestorians believed that there were two natures and two hypostases in Christ. Nestorius and his followers liked to use the Greek word “prosopon” for persons also. Two hypostases, he believed, were taught when Jesus said, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19), and when the Apostle Paul wrote of Christ being in the “form of God” and in the “form of a servant” (Phil 2:6).

As I mentioned earlier the main problem with Nestorianism is that it is weak on the unity of Christ’s two natures. For him the union between the natures was simply “a union of good-pleasure.”⁷

Titles of Christ indicate the nature. Besides a theological weakness concerning the unity of the two natures, Nestorius erred in a hermeneutical system which he created for understanding the natures and hypostases of Christ. The varying titles of Christ used in Scripture, Nestorius held, offered the key to understanding the two hypostases. For Nestorius and his followers, the title “Jesus” always refers to His manhood. The titles “God” and “Word” refer to only to His Godhood. They said, for example, that the Gospels did not say “Now the birth of *God* was thus” (Matt. 1:18), “*God* grew in stature and in wisdom and in grace” (Luke 2:40), “*God* was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness” (Matt. 4:1), “*God* cried out in a loud voice” upon the cross (Matt. 27:50). Rather, the gospel writers used the name of the person of the manhood, “Jesus.”

For Nestorius, the titles “Christ,” “Lord,” and “Son” were “indications of the two natures: sometimes of this, sometimes of that, and sometimes of this and that.”⁸ By use of these three titles, Nestorius said, the apostles expressed both human and divine things

⁷ Quoted in Bethune-Baker, *Nestorius and his Teaching*, 153.

⁸ Quoted in Bethune-Baker, *Nestorius and his Teaching*, 161.

and the union of the natures. One of the key Scripture passages they used to support this hermeneutic was Acts 2:36: “God has made this Jesus, Lord and Christ.”

ORTHODOX CHRISTOLOGY

Theotokos. Nestorius’ opponents believed that Mary was rightly called theotokos, or Mother of God, because Christ is truly God. They supported this with the Biblical passage about the birth of Christ that says, “Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which is interpreted *God with us*” (Isa. 7:14). Now in calling Mary the Mother of God, the orthodox were not saying that God had a beginning, but rather, “this selfsame one was born of Mary the virgin, who is God-bearer in respect to his human-ness.”⁹

At the Council of Constantinople in 553, the orthodox ruled that “If anyone says that the holy, glorious, and everlasting virgin Mary is called Theotokos by misuse of language and not truly, or by analogy, believing that only a mere man was born of her and that God the Word was not incarnate of her...or if anyone shall call her anthropotokos or Christokos, as if Christ were not God...let him be anathema.”¹⁰

One hypostasis. The orthodox believed that Nestorius’ union of the natures by a mere union of “good-pleasure” or “dignity” was not strong enough. The hypostasis, or person, is what united Christ’s two natures. According to Cyril, joining the two natures “in a mere association of dignity, or of authority or of power, and not, rather, in a real

⁹ *Definition of Chalcedon* in John H. Leith, *Creeeds of the Churches*, Rev. ed. (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1973), 36.

¹⁰ Leith, *Creeeds of the Churches*, 48.

physical union” was worthy of anathema.¹¹ For, he said, the apostles Peter and John were equal in honor to each other, but they were still two, not one. The Council of Constantinople (553) did in fact anathematize the opinion that says Christ’s two natures are united only in dignity or honor, and not by His Person, saying, “If anyone understands the expression—one hypostasis of our Lord Jesus Christ—so that it means the union of many hypostases, and if he attempts thus to introduce into the mystery of Christ two hypostases, or two persons, and after having introduced two persons, speaks of one person according to dignity, honor or worship, as Theodore and Nestorius insanely have written...let him be anathema.”¹²

As Nestorius thought that one hypostasis posed danger to the divine nature of Christ and the Trinity by making God passible, the orthodox thought that the Nestorian assertion of two hypostases or two prosopa was dangerous to the Trinity. If there are three hypostases in the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—then having two hypostases in Christ introduces a quaternity in the Trinity.

Another problem that orthodoxy had with two hypostases is that it implied that there are two Sons in Christ, requiring two different adorations on the part of believers. Although the Lord Jesus Christ has two natures, and is fully God as well as fully human, He is only one person or hypostasis, one Son of God. When Jesus walked on water it certainly showed His divinity, but he needed human feet to do it. Yet He was only one Person walking. On the cross Jesus thirsted, showing His clear humanity, but at the same time opened the gates of Paradise to the thief next to Him, showing clearly His divinity. But He is only one Person. The Apostle Paul taught this in 1 Cor. 8:6: “To us there

¹¹ Cyril of Alexandria, *Anathemas against Nestorius* in *The Church Teaches* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1955), 168.

is...*one* Lord Jesus Christ by whom are all things.” This the fathers of Nicea declared, as we know from the Nicene Creed which reads: “We believe...in *one* Lord Jesus Christ.”

The Definition of Chalcedon (451) explained the orthodox definition of the “hypostatic union” as follows:

We apprehend this one and only Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten in two natures; without confusing the two natures, without transmuting one nature into the other, without dividing them into separate categories, without contrasting them according to area or function. The distinctiveness of each nature is not nullified by the union. Instead the properties of each nature are conserved and both natures concur in one *prosopon* and in one *hypostasis*. They are not divided or cut into two prosopa, but are together the one and only and only-begotten Logos of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus have the prophets of old testified; thus the Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us; thus the Symbol of the Fathers has handed down to us.”¹³

Titles of Christ indicate the person, not the nature. Although Nestorius supported his theory of “titles” with certain Bible passages, the orthodox found that this hermeneutic was not in conformity with the entirety of Scripture. The orthodox position is that when the Apostles used a title of Christ, it was indicative of the Person of the God-man, not a specific nature. For this reason the Biblical writers sometimes used divine titles in descriptions of activities of Christ common to humanity such as being born and dying, and sometimes used human titles describing acts which only God can perform such as forgiving sin and granting salvation.

For example, Isaiah wrote: “For unto us a Son is born: unto us a *child* is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder; and His name shall be called the angel of great counsel, *God* the mighty...” (Isa. 9:6). And when writing of Christ’s death, Scripture often used divine titles, such as “in whom we have redemption through His *blood*, the remission of sins; who is the image of the invisible *God*” (Col. 1:14-15),

¹² Leith, *Creeds of the Churches*, 47.

¹³ Leith, *Creeds of the Churches*, 36.

“Truly this *man* was the Son of *God*” (Mark 15:39), and “You *killed* the Prince of life” (Acts 3:15).

Examples of when Scripture writers used human titles in narratives which clearly indicate divinity include “The Son of *Man* has power on earth to forgive sins” (Matt. 9:6), “The Son of *Man* came to seek and save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10), “No man hath ascended up to heaven, but *he that came down from heaven*, even the Son of *Man*...” (John 3:13), and “Do you believe in the Son of *Man*?...Lord, I believe: and he *worshipped* Him.” (John 9:35-38).

Cyril, citing the Nicene Creed which speaks of “one Lord Jesus Christ, only-begotten Son,” said that all of these names—“Lord,” “Jesus,” “Christ,” “only-begotten,” and “Son” belong jointly to the divinity and humanity. And Pope Leo taught that “because of this unity of person, which we must understand to subsist in a twofold nature, we read that the Son of Man came down from heaven, and conversely we say that the Son of God was crucified and buried (even though he endured these things not in that divine nature...but in the weakness of his human nature).”¹⁴ And John Cassian concluded: “Whatever may be the names given Him, in all cases it is one and the same Person. Though there may be some variety in the appearance of His titles, yet there is but a single Divine Person meant by all the names.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Norris, *The Christological Controversy*, 151.

¹⁵ *On the Incarnation, Against Nestorius*, IV. 8 inNPNF, Seriets II, XI: 577.

THE SURVIVAL OF NESTORIANISM

In Persia and Central Asia. After the councils and imperial edicts had condemned the Nestorian party in the fifth century, the Nestorian movement migrated across the Eastern border of the Roman Empire and organized itself in Persia.

There were many Persian Christians studying at the ecclesiastical school in Edessa in Syria, which was in the Roman Empire but not far from the Persian empire. Edessa was a great literary center for all the neighboring lands including Armenia, Chaldaeia, and Persia. At the time of the Council of Ephesus, the bishop of Edessa theologically was a devoted disciple of the Antiochene school of Theodore of Mopsuestia. But at the Council of Ephesus he took the side of orthodoxy in opposition to Nestorius. Immediately upon returning to Edessa, he held a synod on the issue of Nestorian Christology, and ended up expelling the Persian school from Edessa.

The Nestorian movement was laid in Hardascir, Persia through a bishop named Ibas. Ibas translated into Persian the works of Theodore of Mopsuestia and Diodorus of Tarsus, a predecessor of Theodore in the Antiochene school.

One of the expelled scholars in the Persian school at Edessa named Barsumas was also influential in the establishment of Nestorian Christianity in Persia. He obtained the bishopric of Nisibis in 435 and held it until his death in 489 and exerted a considerable influence upon the Zoroastrian kings of Persia. There in Nisibis the Nestorians established a flourishing school, and in 499 a Persian synod abolished clerical celibacy.

These Christians in Persia never called themselves Nestorians, but preferred “Churches of the East.” They were some of the most successful missionaries in

Christendom. Within fifty years they spread their faith to the Huns (Turks), Medes, and Elamites, and Indians, basically to all the lands north, south, and east of Persia.

A historian who lived 973-1048 left a portrait of Nestorian Christianity in Central Asia at that time. One notable feature that he dwelt on was its engagement in intellectual activity. He also related that they observed Lent, Christmas, Epiphany, and other feasts, and told of an interesting practice on a certain feast day of Christians wandering from the naves of their churches up to the roofs in memory of the return of the Israelites to Jerusalem.

In India. By 547 the Nestorians, centralized in Persia, had organized churches in India. In 1291 a Roman Catholic missionary from Europe traveled to India, where he found a church of Saint Thomas the Apostle, and to Cathay in the realm of the emperor of the Tartars. A letter tells of the “Nestorians” having “grown so powerful in these parts that they will not allow a Christian of another ritual to have ever so small a chapel or to publish any doctrine different from their own.”¹⁶ He tells of them bringing upon him persecutions for five years, accusing him of being a spy and of murder. Later, however, he built a church, baptized over 6000 persons, and started a school attended by over 150 boys, and converted the king from the Nestorian sect to the Catholic faith.

An Italian trader in 1440 said that there were about a thousand Nestorians living in Mylapore and that they venerated the tomb of St. Thomas. Many of the Nestorian Christians in India during Europe’s age of discovery looked to the Nestorian patriarch, but many in India became subject to the Pope under Portuguese influence.

In China. By 636 they engaged in missions to China. We know this from a monument discovered in Siganfu by the Jesuits. The tablet described the presence of the

Christians of the East in 636 and related their progress until 781 when it was written. A portion of it in translation is cited below:

It was then that our Messiah, who is a Person proceeding forth from the Trinity and who is the object of the veneration of the Luminous, having concealed His true majesty, became man and entered this world. The spirits and the heavens proclaimed the glad tidings when a Virgin gave birth to the Holy One in Ta Ss'in; and a luminous star announced the auspicious event, so that Persians beholding the radiance hastened forth to offer tribute. Having fulfilled the Old Law as it was recorded by the twenty-four Prophets, He promulgated the great rules for the family and the state; by founding the ineffable New Church of the Holy Spirit of the Trinity, He imparted goodness and beneficence to men through the gift of the Orthodox Faith. By establishing the Eight Beatitudes, He transformed the worldly into the saintly, and by opening the portals of the Three Constant Virtues, He gave Life and destroyed Death. The satanic perfidies were overthrown when he hung up the Luminous Sun to assault the Castle of Darkness, and rational beings were saved when he rowed the Bark of Mercy to ferry them to the Palace of Light. Having accomplished His mission, He ascended into Heaven at noon, leaving behind Him a Scripture of twenty-seven books for the purpose of diffusing the Divine Teaching and of awakening souls. His Law prescribes ablution with water and the Spirit to purge away the love of worldly pomps and render the soul pure and white. His Sign is an uplifted Cross...¹⁷

In Spain. In Spain several bishops in the eighth and ninth century were convicted of "adoptionist" Christology. Among them were Elipandus, the archbishop of Toledo (d. 802), and Felix of Ergel (d. 818). In some sense this was a revival of Nestorian Christology in modified form. However, John Cavadini, in a recent book entitled *The Last Christology of the West: Adoptionism in Spain and Gaul 785-820*, may argue against branding Spanish adoptionism as "Nestorianism."

In the Middle East. Under later Islamic rule, the Nestorian Christians continued to remain isolated from the churches of the West. In the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries the Nestorian patriarchy still resided in Persia near Baghdad, but persecutions by the Muslims were becoming more frequent, and conditions had become dangerous. Most of the Nestorians moved to Turkish Kurdistan in the middle of the sixteenth century, and the majority of Nestorians in the world have been in that region since that

¹⁶ Barry, *Readings in Church History*, I, 590-592.

¹⁷ Colman J. Barry, ed., *Readings in Church History*, Vol. 1 (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1985), 301.

time. Over the last 500 years many negotiations between Nestorian patriarchs and the Pope have taken place, but the Nestorians still retain their non-Chalcedonian Christology. During World War I the Nestorian communities fought on the side of the allies, and after the war the nationalist reaction in Turkey almost exterminated them. As a result, the number of Nestorian Christians in Iraq, Syria, and southern Russia has dwindled down to under 40,000. In the late twentieth century, the patriarch, who was only twenty-one years old in 1973, established close ties with the Church of England, and pursued his studies at Canterbury.

In American Pentecostalism. Nestorianism survives wherever Christians so separate the two natures of Christ that they introduce two persons. Although I am unaware of any official ecclesiastical links with Nestorian churches of the East, American Pentecostals often propagate such Nestorian Christology. For example, televangelist Oral Roberts so separates the deity and humanity of Christ that he sometimes seems to introduce two hypostases. In one article Roberts wrote that when Jesus died on the cross, only His humanity was touched, not “the real Christ.” In the same article, Roberts speaks of “Christ’s other self.”¹⁸

While I think Roberts teaches Nestorian Christology unknowingly, some “oneness” Pentecostals in America have consciously aligned themselves with the Christology of Nestorius. For example, John Paterson clearly rejects the Theotokos, writing,

In the latter part of the fourth century, some of the keenest minds in Christendom vigorously opposed this unscriptural title [i.e. Mother of God], and its final incorporation in the Creed is associated with a shameful history of compromise and political intrigue! In spite of the

¹⁸ Oral Roberts, “The Gifts of the Spirit” in Theodore Runyon, ed., *What the Spirit is Saying to the Churches* (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1975), 36-39.

good intentions of those who introduced this title, their reasoning was defective and confused, and the title is unscriptural and untrue. Mary was the mother of the *Son of Man*.¹⁹

In an appendix of the same work, Paterson objected to the use of the term “God-man” and praised Nestorius as a notable church leader who rightly distinguished Christ as “fully God and fully man in two complete and distinct natures.”²⁰

A simple, but sublime, lesson the Church can learn from Nestorianism: Don’t take the hyphen out of God-man.

¹⁹ John Paterson, *God in Christ Jesus* (Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame Press, 1966), 22-23.

²⁰ Paterson, *God in Christ Jesus*, 51.