

Ancient Church History 23

Christology and the Council of Chalcedon

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. [...] And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

—John 1:1-2, 14

- I. Introduction
 - a. Ephesus and Nestorius
 - b. Eutyches and Monophysitism
 - c. Chalcedon and Previous Councils
- II. An Examination of the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451)
 - a. A Word about Theological Method: “Apophatic Theology”: Theology by Negation
 - b. The Chalcedonian “Definition”

“Following the saintly fathers, we all with one voice teach the confession of one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ: the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man, of a rational soul and a body; consubstantial with the Father as regards his divinity, and the same consubstantial with us as regards his humanity; like us in all respects except for sin; begotten before the ages from the Father as regards his divinity, and in the last days the same for us and for our salvation from Mary, the virgin God-bearer, as regards his humanity; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, acknowledged in two natures which undergo no confusion, no change, no division, no separation; at no point was the difference between the natures taken away through the union, but rather the property of both natures is preserved and comes together into a single person and a single subsistent being; he is not parted or divided into two persons, but is one and the same only-begotten Son, God, Word, Lord Jesus Christ, just as the prophets taught from the beginning about him, and as the Lord Jesus Christ himself instructed us, and as the creed of the fathers handed it down to us.”¹
 - c. Affirmations of the Past (From Nicæa)
 - i. “One and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ”
 - ii. “The same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man”
 - iii. “Begotten before all ages from the Father as regards his divinity”
 - iv. “The same for us and for our salvation from Mary...as regards his humanity”
 - d. Clarifications for the Present
 - i. *Theotokos* (Gr. Θεοτόκος)
 - ii. The Boundaries of Christological Orthodoxy
- III. Orthodox Christology: The Hypostatic Union
 - a. One Person

¹ As quoted in Chad Van Dixhoorn, *Creeeds, Confessions, and Catechisms: A Reader's Edition* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 27.

- b. Two Natures
- c. How Does This “Work”? Two Possible Solutions
 - i. Kenosis Theory
 - 1. Does Philippians 2:7 teach this?
 - 2. What is the problem with this?
 - ii. Chalcedonian Christology
 - 1. “...at no point was the difference between the natures taken away through the union, but rather **the property of both natures is preserved** and comes together into a single person and a single subsistent being...”
 - 2. The *Communicatio idiomatum*
 - 3. WCF 8.7: “Christ, in the work of mediation, acteth according to both natures; by each nature doing that which is proper to itself; yet, by reason of the unity of the person, that which is proper to one nature is sometimes, in Scripture, attributed to the person denominated by the other nature.”

IV. Aftermath

- a. Immediate Schism: The Coptic Church
- b. Monophysitism/Miaphysitism (from Gr. *μόνος/μία*, “one”; and *φύσις*, “nature”)

V. Conclusion

- a. Chalcedonian Influence in the Westminster Standards
 - i. WCF 8.2: “The Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance, and equal with the Father, did, when the fulness of time was come, take upon him man’s nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin: being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the Virgin Mary, of her substance. So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man.”
 - ii. WLC 36: “The only Mediator of the covenant of grace is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, of one substance and equal with the Father, in the fulness of time became man, and so was and continues to be God and man, in two entire distinct natures, and one person, forever” (see WSC 21).
- b. Theology Matters
- c. Keep Learning!