**13 - ST. CYRIL AND NESTORIANISM**

St. Cyril’s name is forever connected with the second great Christological controversy, which led to the Council of Ephesus (431 A.D) and the condemnation of Nestorius[[1]](#footnote-1). He is reckoned as one of the outstanding Fathers and theologians of the Church. The patristic understanding of the Incarnation owes more to Cyril of Alexandria than to any other individual theologian[[2]](#footnote-2).

# HIS BOYHOOD

His wealthy and pious grandparents lived in Memphis, which was called Arcadia (recently Meet-Rahena in the south of Giza). On the death of the grandparents, the Ethiopian nursemaid who was heathen, but heartily loved Christianity, took care of the two children: Theophilus and his young sister (Cyril’s mother). She accompanied the children to the temple of Artimus and Apollon. On their arrival many idols fell down, and the nursemaid became afraid. She escaped to Alexandria and met St. Athanasius who related to her what happened to her in the temple. She was converted and the three were baptized.

Theophilus was consecrated Pope of Alexandria and his sister lived in a virgin’s community until she was married to a pious man from Mehallet-el-bourg (Didoyscya) north of Mehalla - al -Kobra. Cyril was born, in Alexandria, between 375 and 380 A.D, and evidently received his classical and theological training at this great centre of learning, besides the instruction he had received from his uncle.

He was very intelligent, gifted by his angelic voice in reading the Gospel and reciting the church hymns, besides his excellent ability for learning by heart the Holy Scripture.

# IN SECETIS’ WILDERNESS

He states: [From early years we learned the Holy Scriptures and were nurtured at the hands of holy and orthodox fathers[[3]](#footnote-3)]; here he may mean “monks” by the word “fathers.” According to Severus lbn-al-Muquafaa he was sent by his uncle to St. Macarius’ Monastery, where he became a disciple of St. Serapion the Great. After *5* years his uncle summoned him, appointed him deacon, then a priest to assist him in taking care of his people. Usually he accompanied him in the important meetings, even in the “Synod of the Oak,” near Chalcedon where St. John Chrysostom was condemned in 403 A.D.

# POPE OF ALEXANDRIA

When the Alexandrian Pope Theophilus died on October 15, 412 A.D, the government wanted a certain archdeacon Timothy to succeed, but two days afterwards Cyril, the nephew of the late patriarch, was elected and consecrated. According to the Coptic rite he visited the Monastery of St. Macarius where he served the first Liturgy of the Eucharist.

# HIS STRUGGLE

In 433 A.D St. Cyril was occupied in refuting the charges of the impious Julian mentioned in his three books: “Against the Galileans” (362- 363 A.D). Ten of the thirty books of Cyril survive.

He came into conflict with the Novations who refused the repentance of those who denied their faith through persecution. Many troubles happened to the Christians through the Jews who represented a very strong community in Alexandria. They raised an outcry that a certain church was on fire, and then slaughtered all the Christians who turned out to save it. St. Cyril did his best to drive all Jews out of the city. His relentless fight against the last remnants of paganism was most probably the reason why he has been accused, as Socrates[[4]](#footnote-4) insinuated, of being responsible for the murder of Hypatia, a female neoplatonist philosopher and close friend of Orestes, city prefect. She was brutally done to death (March 415 A.D) by some Christians[[5]](#footnote-5).

# ST. CYRIL AND ST. CHRYSOSTOM

He summoned a local council in Alexandria, where he admitted the name of St. John Chrysostom to the diptychs, i.e., the roll of those whose names should be included in the prayers of the Liturgy. He called him a “holy bishop” and quoted him[[6]](#footnote-6). According to some scholars he took a contrary view to his uncle in this matter[[7]](#footnote-7), but according to our Coptic point of view he fulfilled his uncle’s advice, who repented while he was on his death bed.

# ST. CYRIL AND NESTORIUS

It was on April 10, 428 A.D, that Nestorius, a monk of Antioch and disciple of Theodore was consecrated Patriarch of Constantinople. He used the term Christotokos (mother of Christ) for St. Mary, and not Theotokos[[8]](#footnote-8). The battle lines were clearly drawn when one of his priests “Anastasius” whom he had brought from Antioch, preached before St. Cyril in December 428 A.D, saying: [Let no one call Mary “Theotokos,” for Mary was but a woman, and it is impossible that God should be born of a woman[[9]](#footnote-9)].

This teaching Nestorius publicly approved, and he himself preached a course of sermons in which he drew a plain distinction between the man Jesus, born of Mary, and the Son of God who dwelt in him. There were two distinct persons in Christ, the Son of Mary and the Son of God, who were united not hypostatically by only morally. Christ should be called not God but ‘‘ God-bearer (Theoporon), in much the same way as the saints can be called, because of the divine grace given to them. Subsequently, Mary was not the mother of God, but of the man Jesus in whom the Godhead dwelt.

Nestorius and his followers criticized the Wisemen for theirKneeling to the Child Jesus, and preached that the divinity was separated from the humanity at the moment of Crucifixion. The matter came to St. Cyril, Pope of Alexandria, who took occasion in his annual paschal letter (A.D. 429), without any personal reference to Nestorius, to state the doctrine of the Incarnation in the clearest and simplest terms:

Namely that the real, true and perfect manhood in Christ was united to His divinity in one divine Person. Again, four months later, he wrote another letter to the monks of Egypt on the same subject, to put them on their guard. These letters coming to the notice of Nestorius stirred him to great wrath, and he engaged one Photius to answer them. He wrote to the court of Constantinople, trying to enlighten and win the support of the Emperor and the princesses who exercised so much influence on the mind and heart of Theodosius II.

St. Cyril sent letters to Nestorius in which he explains the nature of Christ, as the Incarnate Son of God, one Person, and declared St. Mary’s right to be called “Theotokos.” In his second letter to Nestorius (February, 430 A.D) he writes, [*We do not mean that the nature of the Word was changed and became flesh, or that it was transformed into a complete human being consisting of soul and body; but rather we affirm this, that the Word, hypostatically united to himself flesh, animated with living soul, in a manner mysterious and inconceivable, and became man, and was called Son of Man, yet not merely by way of divine favor or good will, nor again by the simple assumption to himself of a human person, and that while the natures which were joined together to form a real unity were diverse, one Christ and Son carne from both of them - not implying that the difference between the natures was abolished through their union but that instead Godhead and manhood have given us the one Lord, Christ and Son by their mysterious and inexpressible unification. He was not at first born as an ordinary man of the holy Virgin, and then the Word simply descended upon him, but having been made one with the flesh from the very womb itself, he is said to have submitted to a birth according to the flesh, as appropriating and making his own the birth of his own flesh... Thus we confess one Christ and Lord, not “worshipping” a man “along with” the Word but worshipping one and the same Christ because the body of the Lord is not alien from the Lord, with which body also he sits with the Father himself... But if we reject this* ***hypostatic union*** *either as impossible or unseemly, we fell into the error of making two sons… Thus shall we find the holy Fathers to have held. So did they make bold to call the holy Virgin “Theotokos,” Not as though the nature of the Word’ or his Godhead had its beginning from the holy Virgin, but forasmuch as His holy Body, endued with a rational soul, was born of her, to which Body also the Word was hypostatically united, on this account He is said to have been born after the flesh[[10]](#footnote-10).*]

Afterwards a local council was held in Alexandria, and a syndical letter was sent to Nestorius, clarifying the same doctrines mentioned in St. Cyril’s letters, and concluding with “The Twelve Articles or Anathemas.”

# WAS NESTORIUS TRULL Y NESTORIAN?

The discovery early this century of the ‘‘Book of Heracleides’’ a prolix apologia which Nestorius wrote some twenty years after the main controversy and in which he avowed[[11]](#footnote-11) himself satisfied with the Christology of Leo canonized at Chalcedon[[12]](#footnote-12), created a new attitude among some scholars, who regarded him as essentially orthodox but the victim of ecclesiastical politics. They consider him not a heretic but he represented the Antiochian Christology, who set the spark to the controversy between the Alexandrian and the Antiochian theology.

1. In their defense they cannot deny Nestorius’ statements which declare that God cannot have a mother[[13]](#footnote-13), and no creature could have engendered the Godhead; Mary bore a man, the vehicle of divinity but not God, but they state that his theory was not based on the dualist concept of Christ as two sons, but essentially he tried to avoid all suspicions of a confusion or mixing of the natures. He objected to the Alexandrian habit of speaking of God being born and dying, and Mary bearing the divine Word - expressions which he considered[[14]](#footnote-14) contrary to the practice of the Scripture and the creed. Those scholars look to Nestorius’ theory as an echo of the Antiochene theology in defense against the Alexandrian theology of the “**hypostasis union**,” which I will discuss in more detail.
2. By opposing the Alexandrian theory he concentrated on the manhood of Christ, as he thought that the Alexandrians denied the existence of Christ’s human soul. He stated[[15]](#footnote-15) that it is vitally important that Christ should have lived a genuinely human life of growth, temptation and suffering; if the redemption was to be effected, the second Adam must have been a real man. Yet an authentically human experience would have been impossible if the Lord’s humanity had been fused with, or dominated by, His divinity. Hence the two, divinity and humanity, must have existed side by side, each retaining its peculiar properties and operation, unimpaired. Each was a nature (???fvu sij) a term which in his vocabulary[[16]](#footnote-16) connoted, not simply a collection of qualities in the abstract, but the concrete character of a thing. As he explained[[17]](#footnote-17) he could not think of two natures except as each having its prosopon (i.e., its external aspect, or form, as an individual) and its hupostasis (i.e. concrete substance). By this he meant to convey, not that each nature was an actually subsistent entity, but that it was objectively real[[18]](#footnote-18).
3. Nestorius refused the hypostatic union, saying: [The union of God the Word with them (i.e. the body and human soul) is neither hypostatic nor natural but voluntary[[19]](#footnote-19).] Though speaking on occasion of a “union” (enwsij), the term he preferred was “conjunction” (sunafeia) which seemed to avoid all suspicion of a confusion or mixing of the natures.
4. His way of describing this unity or conjunction was to say that there was but one (en or monadicon) prospon in the God-man, using the word in its ordinary sense of an individual considered from the point of view of his outward aspect or form. He stated, [Christ, Who is the prosopon of union[[20]](#footnote-20)]. He assumed[[21]](#footnote-21) that each of the natures continued to subsist in its own prosopon as well as in the “prosopon of union,” or the “common prosopon.”

Now modern scholars are sharply divided[[22]](#footnote-22). But this is not a new attitude, for Nestorius found many theologians and churchmen who would support him because of his acceptance of the Tome of Leo and his praising it, as we will see in discussing “St. Dioscorus and Eutychianism,”

According to Tixeront[[23]](#footnote-23) Nestorius was a heretic but the school of Antioch was responsible. St. Cyril was right in pointing to Diodore (dean of the Antiochian school) as a forerunner of Nestorius. In his eagerness to maintain the integrity of the two natures in Jesus Christ against the Apollinarianists, Diodore emphasized the distinction between the Son of God and the son of David whom the former assumed and in whom He dwelt[[24]](#footnote-24). Hence it is only through a figure of speech (cata c psicwd)and because the son of David was the tabernacle of the Logos, that we may say of the Logos, the Son of God, that He is the son of David. The Logos is not the son of David; He is His Lord[[25]](#footnote-25); He is not the son of Mary[[26]](#footnote-26)… Therefore the man born of Mary is the Son of God, not by nature but by grace, the Word alone is so by nature[[27]](#footnote-27). Tixeront concludes: [He probably maintained, at least in words, the unity of person[[28]](#footnote-28), and certainly looked upon the man in Jesus as worthy of adoration together with the Word. But, notwithstanding his endeavor thus to preserve and justify the current language, it is quite evident that several of his assertions cannot be accepted and that, while he attempts to emphasize the non-confusion of the two natures in Christ, he unduly separates and isolates them[[29]](#footnote-29)]

Theodore, the disciple of Diodore, is generally regarded as the true Nestorius, i.e., the theoretical exponent of the heresy to which the Patriarch of Constantinople gave his name[[30]](#footnote-30). Tixeront mentions many quotations of Theodore by which he confirms the unity of the natures, and he concludes: [Now, in spite of what he says to the contrary, these statements of Theodore show evidently that he believes in two sons in Jesus Christ, just as in two lords. While there is only one sonship and one lordship, essential in the Word, adoptive and participated in Jesus, there are two subjects of that lordship and sonship[[31]](#footnote-31)]

Now, concerning Nestorius, he usually repeats the statement:[There are two natures in but One person (???[[32]](#footnote-32)*)*. How does Nestorius understand this “one prosopon”?

Like Theodore, he seems now and then to look upon it merely as a communication of dignity, power, authority and adorable prerogatives, made by the divine nature or the Logos to His humanity[[33]](#footnote-33).

He failed to explain satisfactorily the unity of person in Christ, and to draw the necessary consequences from that unity[[34]](#footnote-34). He stated:

[When the Holy Writ intends to mention Christ’s birth from the Blessed Virgin or His death, it does not say “God” but either “Christ” or “the Son” or “the Lord,” because these appellation can be applied to the two natures, either to the one or to the other, or to both[[35]](#footnote-35)].

[... Although being one, is two-fold, not in dignity, but in nature[[36]](#footnote-36)].

[The natures subsist in **their prosopons** and in their natures, and in « **the prosopon of union** »[[37]](#footnote-37)).

[The divinity makes use of the prosopon of the humanity and the humanity of that of the divinity[[38]](#footnote-38)).

[Am I, then, the only one who calls Christ “double”? Does he not designate himself both as a temple that can be destroyed and as a God...?[[39]](#footnote-39)].

# THE COUNCIL OF EPHESUS

In June 22, 431 A.D, the Third Ecumenical Council was held at Ephesis, over which St. Cyril president. It was opened without waiting for the arrival either of the Syrian bishops, headed by John of Antioch, who formed the party most likely to take a sympathetic view of Nestorius, or of the delegates of Celestine, bishop (Pope) of Rome.

The Council first had the Creed of Nicea read, then St. Cyril’s second letter to Nestorius (Ep. 4) and the latter’s reply. That reply was immediately condemned by some bishops, and a general anathema pronounced against the heresiarch. There followed the reading of the letter of Celestine and the Roman synod to Cyril (Ep. 12) and the synodal letter of Cyril and the council of Egyptian bishops (Ep. 17). Lastly, against a Patristic memoir compiled from the writings of the Fathers on the Incarnation there was arrayed a collection of twenty fragments taken from the writings of Nestorius[[40]](#footnote-40).

Nestorius was deposed from his see and excommunicated, his doctrines condemned, the creed of Nicea reaffirmed, and formal approval was given to the title “Theotokos,”

Besides the Nestorian heresy, the council discussed the Pelagianism which holds that man can take the initial and fundamental steps towards salvation through his own efforts, independent divine grace.

# AN OPPOSITE COUNCIL

On the arrival of John of Antioch, joined by Theodoret of Cyrrhus and other bishops, a rival meeting was held at which St. Cyril and Memnon of Ephesus were excommunicated and deposed as guilty of violence and heresy. Forty three bishops subscribed to that sentence, which was delivered to the Emperors and the princesses, and to the clergy, senate and people of Constantinople[[41]](#footnote-41).

Every party had its supporters into the court, and the Emperor, more or less uncertain, did notKnow which side to support. St. Cyril was put into jail for two months and was permitted to return to his see, but Nestorius was exiled into Egypt where he died in Upper Egypt. Until today there is a hill which is called “Hill of Nestorius,” where he was hurried and the Egyptians used to throw stones on his grave so that it became a hill.

A reconciliation between John and Cyril was finally effected in 433 A.D, but the dispute between the Antiochene and the Alexandrian theology was temporarily stopped to reappear in an extreme degree in the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D.

# REUNION OF 433

The emperor himself exerted his influence to re-establish peace between St. Cyril and John of Antioch, for each represented a different theological point of view. John sent Paul of Emesa to Alexandria with credentials for Cyril, and a profession of faith that was to serve as the basis of an agreement. St. Cyril accepted it and sent back to Antioch his famous letter “Laetentur caeli[[42]](#footnote-42),” i.e., the “Formulary of Reunion of 433,” The problem was externally solved, but the “Reunion” itself was being taken in a different way by the Alexandrian and the Antiochene sides[[43]](#footnote-43).

The “Formularly of Reunion” in fact did not suffice the two parties. St. Cyril accepted it just as it led the Antiochenes to accept the Council of Ephesus (431) unconditionally. He made this point clear, in his letters to Acacius of Melitene, Valerian of Iconium and Succensus of Diacaesarea. He wrote to Acacius that the reunion was an attempt to bring about peace in the Church[[44]](#footnote-44). In his letters to Acacius, Valerian and Succensus he defends himself in accepting the reunion, explaining that the Antiochenes had raised three main objections to the Council of Ephesus, namely:

1. Cyril’s theological position as reflected in his writings, particularly in the anathemas, was heretical.
2. Nestorius was not a heretic, and his condemnation was unjustifiable.
3. The Council. of Ephesus which had declared the first orthodox and decided against the second was a heretical gathering.

Now, we can understand why St. Cyril accepted the “reunion,”

The Antiochenes also were not satisfied by the reunion; many of them who accepted it raised men in important sees to attack the Alexandrian terms of Christology. Theodoret, as an example, accepted it but he refused to condemn Nestorius.

After a sort of introduction, the Formula says[[45]](#footnote-45).

[We confess, therefore, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten Son of God, perfect God and perfect Man, consisting of a rational soul and a body, begotten of the Father before the ages as touching his Godhead, the same, in the last days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, as touching his Manhood; the same of one substance with the Father as touching his Godhead, and one substance with us as touching his Manhood. For of two natures a union has been made. For this cause we confess one Christ, one Son, one Lord.

In accordance with this sense of the unconfused union, we confess the holy Virgin to be Theotokos, because God the Word became incarnate and was made man, and from the very conception united to himself the temple taken from her. And as to the expressions concerning the Lord in the Gospels and Epistles, we are aware that theologians understand some as common, as relating to one Person, and others they distinguish, as relating to two natures, explaining those that befit the divine nature according to the Godhead of Christ, and those of a humble sort according to His Manhood.]

# HIS WRITINGS[[46]](#footnote-46)

St. Cyril is one of the greatest figures of early Christian literature. His writings reveal a depth of thought and richness of ideas, a precision and clarity of argument that prove the speculative and dialectic talent of the author, and make his writings first class sources for the history of dogma and Christian doctrine.

His literature was devoted to exegesis and polemics against the Arians until 428, then was almost completely taken up by his refutation of the Nestorian heresy.

**1 - Commentaries on the O.T.**

I. The 17 books: “**The Adoration and Worship of God in Spirit and in Truth**” present in the form of a dialogue between St. Cyril and Palladius an allegoric or typological exegesis of specifically chosen passages of the Pentateuch.

Book 1: The sin of Adam and Eve and the deliverance of man from slavery of sin and Satan.

2, 3: Justification through Christ.

4, 5: The resolution of the human will to persevere and preserve it.

6: The basis of our salvation is the love of God.

7 ‘ 8: and the love of neighbor.

9 – 13: The Church and priesthood.

14-15: The spiritual worship of the Christians, foreshadowed in the institutions of the Old Testament.

17: The feasts of the Jews, especially the Pasch.

II. Glaphyra

13 Books contain expositions of select Pentateuch passages.

III: Comm. on Isaiah.

IV: Comm. on the Minor Prophets.

**2- Comm. on the N.T.**

I. Comm. on the Gospel of St. John.

II. Comm. on the Gospel of St. Luke.

III. Comm. on the Gospel of St. Matthew.

**3 - Dogmatic-Polemical Writings Against the Arians.**

I. Thesaurus de sancta et consubstantiali Trinitate.

II. De Sancta et consubstantiali Trinitate.

**4- Dogmatic-Polemical Writings against the Nestorians.**

I. Adversus Nestorii balsphenias.

The first of the anti-Nestorian treatises is the “Five Tomes against Nestorius’’ composed in the spring of 430.

II. De recta fide (On the True Faith).

III. The twelve Anathemas against Nestorius.

IV. Apologeticus adimperatorem.

This is an apology to the Emperor Theodosius II immediately after Cyril’s release and his return to Alexandria. He justifies therein his actions, both before and during the Council of Ephesus.

V. Scholia de incarnation Inigenitie.

Composed after 431, gives first an explanation of the names of Christ, Emmanuel and Jesus, and then defines the hypostatic union as opposed to a mixture or external association only.

VI. Adversus nolentes confiterie sanctam Virginem esse Deiparam (Against those that do not acknowledge Mary to be the Mother of God).

VII. Contra Diodorum et Theodorum.

Against Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia, the teachers of Nestorius.

VIII: Quod unus Sit Christus.

Dialogue on the unity of person in Christ.

***5* - Apology against Julian dedicated to Theodosius II.**

**6 - Paschal letters.**

Eusebius tells us that ‘‘Dionysius wrote festal letters in which he raises his voice to make solemn pronouncements about the feast of Easter.” Those by St. Dionysuis of Alexandria are the first examples we possess. The practice was continued in Alexandria. We posses Paschal letters by SS. Athanasius, Peter of Alexandria and Cyril.

**7 - Sermons: Not more than 22 sermons remain of all his sermons.**

**8 - Letters.**

# HIS CHARACTER

1. By the exception of his point of view concerning St. John Chrysostom, many scholars looked to Cyril of Alexandria as a carbon copy of his uncle Theophilus[[47]](#footnote-47). His uncle intended him to be his successor. He prepared him, we may guess, for high office and ensured the solid grounding in Biblical study by high-standard Christian authorities for his future. The influence he exercised on Cyril was deep and lasting; so we may guess from the continuity of policy between uncle and nephew. The same respect for the monks of Egypt, the same vigorous measures against paganism and heresies, the same repudiations of any pretensions by the bishops of the eastern capital to interfere in their see, are to be observed.
2. Because of his warm eagerness to preach Christianity and to purify it from every heresy some ancient and modern scholars describe him as severe and violent, while we read his words[[48]](#footnote-48):

[I live in peace; there is nothing that I detest more than quarrels and disputes. I love everybody, and if I could gain one of the brethren by losing my possessions and goods, I am willing to do so joyfully because it is concord that I value most... But there is question of the faith and of a scandal which concerns all the churches of the Roman Empire... The sacred doctrine is entrusted to us... How can we remedy those evils?... I am ready to endure with tranquility all blame, all humiliations, all injuries provided that the faith is not endangered. I am filled with love for Nestorius; nobody loves him more than I do...]

Because of his excellent gifts in refuting ‘the heresies, the heretics hated him especially the Nestorians. According to the acts of Chalcedon, Theodoret suggested that a large, heavy stone be placed on his tomb lest he provoke the dead so much that they send him back[[49]](#footnote-49).

# THE THEOLOGY OF ST. CYRIL

**1 - Theological Method**

I. In his system he gave Patristic testimonies supported by Scriptural ones in technical skill and perfection. He called himself, “a lover of sound doctrine, treading in the religious footsteps of the Fathers[[50]](#footnote-50).”

II. As the Arians were accustomed to use proofs from reason, he used the same way in his writings against them.

III. Wickham says: (Cyril’s education made him we may say, a deeply impressive and deeply learned theologian with a dauntingKnowledge of the Bible and able to cope fluently with the complexities of Trinitarian discussion. It did not give him intellectual curiosity; and indeed, it is a gift he would have scorned. Indeed it gave him beliefs as solid as a pyramid whose mode of expressions altered little, over the years[[51]](#footnote-51). Cyril owed little, then, directly to secular culture. Who amongst Christian writers influenced him most? His clearest debt is to Athanasius and one of his earliest work, the “Thesaurus,” is, in the main a digest of Athanasius Discourses against the Arians[[52]](#footnote-52)

**2 - Christology**

In his early writings against the Arians he repeats the same Athanasius attitudes and expressions. It is in the year 429/430 A.D that St. Cyril devoted himself to a deeper investigation of the Christological doctrine in order to prepare himself for a refutation of Nestorius. He declares that the Word became man but did not assume a man[[53]](#footnote-53). He teaches the “hypostatic” union of the Logos and the flesh which He united to Himself[[54]](#footnote-54), confirming this unique unity and giving details of its consequences, which we can summarize in the following points.

1 - **Necessity of the Hypostatic Union**: St. Cyril states: [If we reject this hypostatic union either as impossible or unmeet, we fall into the error of making two sons[[55]](#footnote-55).]

2 - **Hypostatic Union and Nestorian Terminology**: St. Cyril insists on the term “hypostatic Union,” rejecting the terminology of Nestorius who called the union of the two natures (Godhead and manhood) an “indwelling” or a “connection,” or “close participation,” considering these terms as insufficient.

He states:

[We do not say either that the Word of God dwelt in him who was born of the Holy Virgin as in an ordinary man, lest Christ should be ·deemed a divinely inspired man[[56]](#footnote-56), for though the Word dwelt in us (John 1:14), and, as it is said, all the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in Christ bodily (Col. 2:9), yet we recognize that “being made flesh” is not to be defined by us as an ‘‘indwelling’’ of the Word in him in the same manner as when he is said to dwell in the saints, but that having been united -by a union of natures and not converted into flesh, He brought to pass such an indwelling as the soul of man may be said to have in relation to its own body.

There is then one Christ, Son and Lord, not as though He were a man possessing a connection with God simply by a unity of dignity or authority...

Moreover, we do not understand the manner of connection to do that of juxtaposition, for this does not suffice to express a union of natures.

Nor do we understand the union to be in the way of a relationship of participation as we, being joined to the Lord, as it is written, are one spirit with Him (1 Cor. 6:17), but rather we reject the term “connection” altogether, as insufficient to designate the union[[57]](#footnote-57).]

He understood the Nestorian terminology concerning the unity that it supposed a merely external association between the Word and an ordinary man. From this point of view the incarnation became an illusion, a matter of “appearance” and “empty words[[58]](#footnote-58).” The redemption was undermined, since Christ’s sufferings and saving acts were, presumably, not those of God incarnate but of one who was a mere man[[59]](#footnote-59). Similarly the conception of Christ as the second Adam inaugurating a new, regenerated race of mankind demanded, he thought[[60]](#footnote-60), a much more intimate union of the Word with the flesh than Nestorius postulated[[61]](#footnote-61).

**3 - The Hypostatic Union and the Nestorian Dualism:**

St. Cyril repeatedly confirms the Hypostatic Union as the opposite of the Nestorian Dualism, He did not hesitate to say that we are left in ignorance, and that at bottom the unity of Jesus Christ exceeds our comprehension and is unspeakable[[62]](#footnote-62). He teaches that the union began with the conception of Jesus. It is not a man who was born of Mary, but the Word of God according to the humanity. [For there was not born of the Holy Virgin, first an ordinary man, into whom the Word afterwards came down, but having united Himself (to the flesh) in the womb (of Mary) the Word was born according to the flesh, ascribing to Himself the birth of a flesh that is His own[[63]](#footnote-63).]

He confirmed that in the “union” the humanity is not a ‘‘person,” not because He was incomplete man, but because the humanity does not exist apart (idicwc=j). it does not exist by itself, nor does it belong to itself, for it belongs to the Word, who has made it His own[[64]](#footnote-64).

**4 - The Hypostatic Union without Confusion:**

St. Cyril affirms that this hypostatic Union of the two natures had been realized without mixture or change or confusion (*synchysis*). He sates:

[Following in every point the confessions of the Holy Fathers, which they have drawn up under the guidance of the Holy Spirit speaking in them, and keeping close to their intentions taking the royal highway as it were, we affirm that the very Only-Begotten Word of God, begotten of the very substance of the Father..., for our salvation came down, and of His condescension emptied Himself, and became Incarnate and was made Man, that is to say, having taken flesh of the Holy Virgin, and made it His own from the womb. He vouchsafed to be born as we, and came forth as a human being from a woman, without abandoning what He was, but remaining, even when He assumed flesh and blood, what He was, God in nature and in truth.

We declare that the flesh was not converted into the divine nature, and that neither was the ineffable nature of God the Word debased perverted into the nature of flesh, for He is unchangeable and unalterable, ever remaining the same according to the Scriptures (John 8: 35; 10: 30; Mat. 3: 6)[[65]](#footnote-65)...]

It seems that St. Cyril was accused by some opponents as believing in the confusion of the two natures by affirming the hypostatic union and the “mia-physis” (One incarnate nature of the Word of God). However, he wrote to John of Antioch (23, April): [But let your Holiness vouchsafe to stop the mouths of those who say that there was a mixture or confusion or blending of God the Word with the flesh, for it is likely that some are spreading the report also that I hold or say this. But so far am I from holding anything of the sort that I look upon those as mad who at all imagine that “shadow of turning” Jam. 1: 17 can befall the divine nature of Word[[66]](#footnote-66)...].

Kelly states: [The divinity and the humanity, he pointed out[[67]](#footnote-67), were utterly different in essence, and while the union excluded all division it could not eliminate that difference. On the contrary, despite the fact that the God-man is ‘one nature,’ each of the elements in His being ‘remains and is perceived in its natural property[[68]](#footnote-68).’ Any suggestion that ‘the difference of natures was abolished by the union’ was to be rejected[[69]](#footnote-69).]

**5 - Hypostatic Union and Worshipping Christ:**

**St. Cyril** states: [Confessing then the Word has been hypostatically united with flesh, we worship one Son and Lord, Jesus Christ, without separating man and God, as though they were, connected by a unity of dignity and authority, nor surely calling the Word of God “Christ” in one sense; and in like manner Him who is of the woman “Christ” in another sense, but recognizing the Word of God the Father with His own flesh one Christ and only one. For then he was anointed humanly alongside us, giver though He is of the Holy Spirit without measure to those who are worthy to receive as says the blessed John the Evangelist (John 3: 34)[[70]](#footnote-70).]

St. Cyril who affirms the hypostatic union refused venerating Christ’s manhood because of His Godhood or along with Godhood, for this inspires separation, and makes of Him two Christs. We offer single worship to the One Christ who is the Incarnate Word of God.

He states:

[We refuse to say of Christ: “I venerate the possessed because of the Possessor; I revere the one visible because of the Invisible,” It is a horrible thing to add to this, “the assumed” is called God along with the assumer. To say this is once more to divide Him into two Christs and to posit man separately on his own and to do the same with God [[71]](#footnote-71).]

**6 - Hypostatic Union and the Divine Sacrifice:**

As a consequence of the Hypostatic union of the two natures in one without change or confusion (*synchysis*) the passions, crucifixion, burial and resurrection of Jesus can be attributed to the Incarnate Logos. Thus the divine sacrifice could be realized and our salvation become in hand.

St. Cyril says, [We confess also that the very Son, begotten of God the Father... though being in His own nature impassible, suffered for us in flesh, according to the scriptures, and was in His Crucified “Body impassibly appropriating and making His own the sufferings of His own flesh. And “by the grace of God He tasted death also for every man” (Heb. 2: 9), yielding to death His own body, though originally and by nature ‘‘Life,” and Himself the ‘‘Resurrection”…

We celebrate the service of unbloody sacrifice in the churches, and so approach the mystic Bendictions, and are sanctified, being made partakers of the holy flesh and precious blood of Christ the Savior of us all, receiving not mere flesh, God forbid!, nor flesh of a man hallowed by connection with the Word in some unity of dignity or as having God dwelling in him, but as Life-giving of a truth and the very own flesh of the Word Himself. For being, as God, Life by nature, when He became one with His own flesh, He made that flesh life-giving. So that though He says to us, “Verily I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood” (John 6: 53), yet we shall not account it were the flesh of an ordinary man... but as having become of a truth the own flesh of Him, who for our sakes became and was called Son of Man[[72]](#footnote-72).]

In St. Cyril’s opinion[[73]](#footnote-73), Nestorius had deprived the Eucharist of being the life-giving force and reduced it to cannibalism, since on his premises only the body of a man lay on the altar and the flesh consumed by the faithful was not truly vivified by the Logos[[74]](#footnote-74).

3 - Like St. Athanasius he accepts and exploits the “Communicatis idiomatum” (Communion of idioms), stating that the flesh of Christ shares in the names and properties of the Word and vice versa. In other words it is necessary to ascribe to the person of the Word Incarnate the actions, passions, and properties both of the Godhead and manhood. It is correct to say that: [the Word of God suffered in flesh, and became first-begotten from the dead[[75]](#footnote-75)]. [We must therefore confess that the Word has imparted the glory of the divine operation to His own flesh, while at the same time taking to Himself what belongs to the flesh[[76]](#footnote-76).]

However, St. Cyril does not fail to remark that this way of speaking is legitimate only if we consider the divinity and the humanity “in the union[[77]](#footnote-77);” for the divinity itself did not suffer; the Word of God, as such, was not born of the Blessed Virgin; He was not seized, neither bound nor wounded; nor did He die; during the Passion, He was just impassible as the flame into which a red hot iron is plunged; the iron, indeed suffers from the contact, but not the flame[[78]](#footnote-78).

4 - As. St. Cyril used the term (One nature) many scholars believe that he quoted it from the Apollinarian writings as if it were St. Athanasius’ term, but they assure that he was not Apollinarian. Kelly states: [By “flesh” he meant[[79]](#footnote-79) human nature in its fullness, including a rational soul; he took the refutation of Apollinarianism for granted. This humanity was real and concrete[[80]](#footnote-80).]

# ONE NATURE (MIA-PHYSIS) OF CHRIST

St. Cyril used the term: “one incarnate nature of God the Logos,” as a tool to conserve the church’s faith in the Person of Jesus Christ, especially against Nestorianism.

I have already explained this term in my book: “Christology according to the Non-Chalcedonian Orthodox Churches,” Here I would stress these points.

1. This term is Athanasius’ term, but the traditional church term, by which the Church affirms the hypostatic union without separation or confusion.
2. Apollinarius used it[[81]](#footnote-81), and for this reason Cyril’s opponents sometimes accused him with Apolliarianism[[82]](#footnote-82), but he was too far from the theologian systematic Apollinarianism[[83]](#footnote-83).
3. St. Cyril’s term” mia-physis “differs from Eutyche’s one nature, St. Cyril affirms the united nature “out of two natures[[84]](#footnote-84)” without confusion, while Eutyche believed in the absorption of Christ’s manhood which had been totally lost.
4. St. Cyril’s belief in “one united nature out of two natures” was declared clearly, repeatedly and in detail in his two letters addressed to Succensius, bishop of Diocaesarea, in which we remark the following points:
5. In these two letters St. Cyril refuted Diodore’s dyophyseis (two-natures) which caused dualism in the personality of Jesus Christ. St. Cyril affirms that Jesus Christ is one and the same Christ who is the Son of God and became flesh. St. Cyril who was well-educated in Greek literature Knew the distinction between “physis” and “hypostasis,” “Physis” to him was not merely some characteristics of a being but it is too close to one’s substance. Thus if we speak about two natures of Christ it implies two persons, as Diodore and his disciples like Nestorius said. It was too difficult for St. Cyril to accept the “two natures,” because of his defense against Nestorianism,. He states:

[We do not damage the concurrence into unity by declaring it was effected “out of two natures,” however, after the union we do not divide the natures from each other and do not sever the one and indivisible into two sons but say “one Son” and as the fathers have put it, “one incarnate nature of the Word[[85]](#footnote-85).”]

B - St. Cyril explains the unity of the two natures into one by man himself who is composed of body and soul, of two different natures, but we believe that we have one united human nature[[86]](#footnote-86).

C- St. Cyril refuted the claims of the Nestorians against the “one incarnate nature of the Word,” explaining that this belief does not mean that God experienced suffering in His own nature[[87]](#footnote-87), nor that a sort of merger and mixture occurred between Godhead and manhood[[88]](#footnote-88), or that manhood had been lost[[89]](#footnote-89).

Here, we refer to the misunderstanding of the Chalcedonian churches towards us, as they believed that we are monophesites, as if we are Eutychians, In the last two decades many conferences were held to set a formula that suffices the Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian churches concerning the nature of Christ, to declare the close concepts of the two parties in spite of the difference in terminology.

# MARIOLOGY

St. Cyril asserts the “Theotokos” (Mother of God) for St. Mary as a sign of the orthodox faith that Jesus Christ who was born and crucified is truly the Incarnate Son of God. This term had been employed by the School of Alexandria for a long time. The English translation “Mother of God’’ brings into prominence that thought of the glory of her motherhood, the Greek term fixes attention rather on the Godhead of Him who was born[[90]](#footnote-90). To deny that she was “Theotokos” was really to deny that He who was born of her was Incarnate God. St. Cyril starts his 12 “Anathemas” thus: “Whoever does not acknowledge Emmanuel to be truly God and hence the holy Virgin “Theotokos,” for she gave fleshly birth to the Word of God made flesh, shall be anathema.”

He devoted to the defense of the “Theotokos” two whole treatises, the “*Quod Sancta Virgo Deipara sitet non Christipara*” and the “*Quod beata Maria sit Dei para,*” besides considerable portions of other works, for instance, the first book of the “*Adversus Nestorii blasphemias*,” and the first part of the “*De recta fide ad reginas*”[[91]](#footnote-91).

# QUOTATIONS OF ST. CYRIL

* Death devoured the Lamb on behalf of all, and then vomited all in Him and with Him. For we were all in Christ, who died and rose again on our account, and on our behalf (In John 1:29).
* One man would not have been recompense adequate for all mankind, had he been merely a man. But if He is to be conceived of as God incarnate, suffering death in flesh which was His own, then the whole creation would be a small thing in comparison with Him, and the death of one flesh an abundant ransom for the flesh of all. For the flesh was the flesh of the Word who was begotten from God the Father (de rect. fid. 2:7).
* He is sanctified with us, although He is Himself the Sanctifier of all creation; that you might not see Him refusing the measure of human nature, Who consented for the salvation and life of all to become man (In Luc. hom. 12).

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1. Quasten: Patrology, Vol 3, p 116. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. L.R. Wickhan: Cyril of Alexandria, Select Letters, Oxford 1983, p XI. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. E. Schwartz: Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum, 1:1:3, p 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. H.E. 7:15. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Quasten: Patrology, vol 3, p 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Oratis ad Dorninas 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Wickham, p XIII. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Fr. Malaty: St. Mary in the Orthodox Concept, 1978, p 37- 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Socrates: H.E. 7:32. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Wickham, p 7 - 11; J. Stevenson: Creeds, Councils and Controversis, S.P.C.K., 1966, p 277 - 8. PG

77:44 -50. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Heraclides (ed. Nau) p 514; 519. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Kelly: Early Christian Doctrines, 1978, p 312. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Ser. 1 (Loofs, 252). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Kelly, p 312. Cyril c. Nest. Frag.35- 40 (Loofs 278; 295- 7). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Heraclides 132-7; Ser. 1 (Loofs 254 f.),Kelly 312- 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Kelly, p 313. 17- Heracl. 304 f., 442f. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Heracl. 304 f., 442f. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Kelly, p 313. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Heracl. 262. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Ibid 212; 250; 307. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Ibid 305. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Kelly, p 312. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. History of Dogmas, 1916, vol.3, p 10 f. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. PG 77: 1559 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Ibid 1560. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Ibid 1561 A. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. p 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Tixorent, vol.3, p 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Ibid 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Loofs 171; 176, 196, 224, 280 (Tixorent, p 23). [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Loofs 196; 280; 281; 224 (Tixorent, p 24). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Tixorent, vol. 3, p 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Loofs 273, 274, 269. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Loofs 281; cf. 273, 275, 209 etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Heracl. 194. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Ibid 212, 213. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Serm. Theod, (Loofs 259) [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. These texts were taken from SS. Peter of Alexandria, Athanasius, Juilius I of Rome, Felix 1 of Rome, Theophilus of Alexandria, Cyprian, Arnbrosse, Gregory of Nazianus, Atticus of Constantinople and Amphilochius of I conium. Tixeront (vol. 3, p 45, n 120) states that the two fragments credited to Popes Julius and Felix are apocryphal and have Apollinarius for their author. But it is clear when any statement declares the “ one nature “of Christ the Chalcedonians attribute to the Apollinarians, and believe that it is apocryphal. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Mansi IV ‘: 1260 sq. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Ep. 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Samuel, pxix. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. PG 77: 184 A, B. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. St. Cyril: Ep 39; Bindley- Green, p 141 - 4, J. Stevenson,p 291. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Quasten: Patrology, vol 3, p 119- 13S. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Wickham, p. XIII. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. A.Kerrigon: St. Cyril of Alexandria Interpreter of the 0. T. (Analecta Biblica 2) Rome I9S2, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Frances Young: From Nicea to Chalcedon, 1983, p 242. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Third letter to Nestorius. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Wickham alludes here to St. Cyril’s expression concerning the nature of Christ, (one nature of the Word of God Incarnate) which the Council of Chalcedon altered. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Wickham, p XV [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Ep 4S to Succensus. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Second letter to Nestorius (Ep 4). [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Theodoret, apparently falsely, claimed this as a classis designation of Christ in reply to Cyril’s fifth Chapter. (E. Schwarz: Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum 1, 1, 6 p 126). [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Third letter to Nestorius (Ep 17). [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Apol. c. Orient PG 76: 324. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. E.g.c. Nest. 3:2; 4:4; S:l. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Ibid 1:1; cf. Adv. Anthrop 10; Ep. 4S PG 77: 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Kelly, p 318. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Tixeront, vol 3, p 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Ep. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Tixeront, p 66, 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Third letter to Nest. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Ep 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. C. Nest. 2:6. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Ep. 46 (ad Succen 2) PG 77: 241. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Ep. 4 (ad Nestor. 2);Kelly, p 321. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. ad Nest. 3 [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. c. Nest. 4:S; 4:6; Ep. ad Nest 3:7; Ep 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Kelly, p 318. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Anath 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. De incarn. Unigen. PG 7S:1241; Cf. Schol de incarn 9 PG 75:1380. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Homil. paschal 17:2 PG 75:777. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Ep. 45; Ep 4; Adv. Nest. blasph. 5: 4; Quod unus sit Christus. PG 75: 236; 45; 232; 1337, 1357. Tixeront, vol3, p 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Ad regin 1:13; De in~arn. Unigen; Quod unus sit Christus. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Kelly, p 319. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Apollinaruis’ belief in one nature based on denying Jesus’ human nature.· In his desire to affirm the oneness of Jesus Christ he said that the Godhead replaced the human soul. By this belief Jesus Christ’s manhood is incomplete. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. First letter to Succesus (Ep 45:5). [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Wikham, p 19 n. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Ep 45:6 (First letter to Succensus). [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Ep 45:7 (see also his letter to Eulogius). [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Ep 46:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Ep 46:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Ep 46:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. J. F. Bethume-Baker: An Indroduction to the Early History of Christian Doctrine, 1920, p 362. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Tixeront, vol 3, p 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)