



The History of the Council of Ephesus from the 1911 Edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*; Monophysitism, Nestorianism, & Calvinism

28. This unfortunate circumstance indicates that the outcome was manipulated not only by human viewpoint but also by demon influence. We don't find much confirmation from present-day accounts of the events surrounding this issue. But back before political correctness was in flower there were objective, straightforward presentations one of which is none other than *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*—13th edition—copyright 1911.
29. We will note its account of the confrontation between Nestorius of Antioch and Cyril of Alexandria. It all started when in 427 Roman emperor Theodosius \thē-a-dō' shē-as\ II appointed Nestorius successor to Sisinnius \sa-sin' ē-as\ as patriarch of Constantinople.
30. The title of patriarch was held by those bishops who had authority over other bishops in various jurisdictions. These are referred to as *sees* and included Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. But ultimate jurisdiction lay with the pope, the “Holy See” in Rome.
31. We have just noted that in one of his earliest sermons, Nestorius attacked the practice of bestowing the title *Theotokos*, “Mother of God,” upon Mary the mother of Jesus. This subject introduces the article in the *Britannica* written by:

Black, John S. and Alexander J. Grieve. *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*. 13th ed. (New York: The Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1911, 1926), 19:410:

NESTORIUS. Syrian ecclesiastic, patriarch of Constantinople from 428 to 431. On the death of Sisinnius, Theodosius II appointed the distinguished preacher of Antioch to the vacant see.

Care was taken to instruct the faithful in such points of orthodoxy as their spiritual head conceived to be the most important or the most in danger. One of these was that involved in the practice, now grown almost universal, of bestowing the epithet Θεοτόκος (*Theotokos*), “Mother of God,” upon Mary the mother of Jesus. In the school of Antioch the impropriety of the expression had long before been pointed out in terms precisely similar to those afterwards attributed to Nestorius.

From Antioch Nestorius had brought along with him to Constantinople a co-presbyter named Anastasius \an-a-stā' zhēas\, who in a pulpit oration which the patriarch himself [Nestorius] is said to have prepared for him, caused great scandal to the partisans of the Marian cultus then beginning, by saying, “Let no one call Mary the mother of God, for Mary was a human being; and that God should be born of a human being is impossible.” The opposition chose to construe this utterance as a denial of the divinity of Christ. The situation went from bad to worse, and the dispute not only grew in intensity but reached the outer world.

Matters were soon ripe for foreign intervention, and the notorious Cyril of Alexandria, in whom the antagonism between the schools of theology at Alexandria and Antioch (1) found a determined and unscrupulous exponent, did not fail to make use of the opportunity.

32. In this paragraph the writers direct the reader to a very instructive footnote that you will find to be quite out of character for the twenty-first century but not unusual for 1911:
- (1) At Alexandria the mystic and allegorical tendency prevailed, at Antioch the practical and historical, and these tendencies showed themselves in different methods of study, exegesis and presentation of doctrine.
33. Cyril organized his own clergy in opposition to Nestorius at Constantinople. He then sent a collection of Nestorius's writings, taken out of context, to Rome to the attention of Pope Celestine \sel' a-st□n\ I accompanied by his own account of the controversy.



34. Celestine did not take lightly any questioning of Roman authority especially from a cleric from Constantinople and as a result he called a synod to meet in 430. The *Britannica* article continues:

In the synod which met in 430, Celestine decided in favour of the epithet **Θεοτόκος** [*theotokos*: “mother of God”], and bade Nestorius retract his erroneous teaching, on pain of instant excommunication, at the same time entrusting the execution of this decision to Cyril of Alexandria. On hearing from Rome, Cyril at once held a synod and drew up a doctrinal formula for Nestorius to sign. Nestorius, instead of yielding to the combined pressure of his two great rivals, merely replied by a counter excommunication.

In this situation the demand for a general council became irresistible, and accordingly Theodosius II (Roman emperor) issued letters summoning the catholic church to meet at Ephesus in 431. Nestorius, with sixteen bishops and a large following of armed men, was among the first to arrive; soon afterwards came Cyril with fifty bishops. Juvenal of Jerusalem and Flavian of Thessalonica were some days late. John of Antioch was delayed and could not appear for some days. Cyril and his friends assembled in the church of the Theotokos on the 22nd of June 431, and summoned Nestorius before them to give an account of his doctrines.

The reply they received was that he (Nestorius) would appear as soon as all the bishops were assembled; and at the same time the imperial commissioner, Candidian \kan-dē di-an\, presented himself in person and formally protested against the opening of the synod. Notwithstanding these circumstances, Cyril and the one hundred and fifty-nine bishops who were with him proceeded to read the imperial letter of convocation and afterwards the letters which had passed between Nestorius and Cyril. Almost immediately the entire assembly with one voice cried out anathema on Nestorius and his doctrines, and then the decree of his exclusion from the episcopate and from all priestly communion was solemnly read and signed by all present. The accused and his friends never had a hearing.

A few days afterwards John of Antioch arrived; and efforts were made by both parties to gain his ear. He was naturally excited by the undue hastiness with which Cyril had acted, and at an assembly of forty-three bishops held in his lodgings shortly after his arrival he was induced by Candidian, the friend of Nestorius, to depose (to remove) the bishops of Alexandria and Ephesus on the spot. The efforts, however, to give effect to this act were frustrated by the zeal of the Ephesian mob. Meanwhile a letter was received from the emperor (Theodosius) declaring invalid the session at which Nestorius had been deposed unheard; numerous sessions and counter-sessions were afterwards held. In the end Theodosius decided to confirm the depositions which had been pronounced on both sides, and Cyril and Nestorius were by his orders laid under arrest. Representatives from each side were now summoned before him (Theodosius) to Chalcedon, and at last, yielding to the sense of the evident majority, he gave a decision in favour of the “orthodox” (meaning the position held by Cyril and fellow Alexandrians), and the council of Ephesus was dissolved.

35. Although the Council of Chalcedon in 451 established an accurate definition of the hypostatic union, poor hermeneutics and legalism led to the opposite being taught by the bishops.
36. The result was the doctrine of monophysitism \ma-nä' fa-sy-tiz' em\, a big word but its development and its meaning are important to our study. We get details from:

Douglas, J. D. (gen. ed.). *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 672-73:

MONOPHYSITISM \ma-nä' fa-sy-tiz' em\ . The text issued at Chalcedon presented both sides of the Incarnation clearly, without getting involved in a philosophical explanation as to how the two natures of Christ are united. They proclaimed him “truly God and truly man.” At the same time the council was careful to point out that part of the uniqueness of Christ was that He was one in person, not divided into two persons.



Unfortunately, unity did not proceed from the Council of Chalcedon. Instead of ending the controversy, it was but the beginning of a dispute which would have an immediate effect on the Christian church over the next two centuries as well as a lasting effect. The opposition to the two natures of Christ became known as "Monophysitism." The name comes from the two Greek words *monos* (μόνος, "only") and *phusis* (φύσις, "nature"). The main emphasis on this movement was that there is but one nature in the Incarnation and not two. This, they felt, was the only way to protect the teaching of the unity of Christ's person. To ascribe two natures to Christ was a denial that man could gain ultimate oneness with God which was the goal of salvation. The result of this emphasis is to play down the manhood of Christ and relegate it to the realm of unimportance.

This reaction to orthodoxy which seems to suddenly emerge after Chalcedon in reality goes back to previous aspects of Christian history. Part of its roots can be traced to Christian monasticism as practiced in the Syria-Palestine region and in Egypt. The monks were in constant battle against their own human weakness and sinfulness. To overcome one's humanity was to gain Christian victory. That which was identified as human had to be destroyed within one's character. For Christ to have a similar human nature as their own would be unthinkable to the Eastern monk.

37. Cyril had been able to convince the authorities that Nestorius taught that Jesus was the union of two distinct persons. Had this been true it would indeed have been heresy. Chalcedon was designed to formalize a definition and then to communicate it to the faithful.
39. Nevertheless, three evils resulted from the Council's effort to develop an accurate definition of the hypostatic union: (1) the distortion of monophysitism, (2) the discrediting of the literal school at Antioch, and (3) the rise of the allegorical school at Alexandria.
40. Cyril was successful in taking the teachings of Nestorius, distorting them into a heresy, and then assigning the error to Nestorius.
41. This led to supporters of Nestorius buying into Cyril's lie and developing a cult known as Nestorianism. Again we note:

Douglas, *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 673:

Nestorius was opposed to the expression applied to Mary as "the mother of God." Mary, he felt, was the mother of Christ, but not the mother of the eternal Logos. Nestorianism took the views of its founder a bit further than he intended. Nestorianism pressed the distinction of the two natures of Christ to the extent of a double personality. Jesus was not the God-man, but instead, the God-bearing man. This led to a definite duality in the person of Christ.

42. With all we have learned from our study of hermeneutics in mind we are able to see how John Calvin and Theodore Bèza serve as an illustration of the relationship between Nestorius of Antioch and Cyril of Alexandria.
43. There are differences in their relationships but similarities of result. Nestorius and Cyril were opponents whereas Calvin and Bèza were associates.
44. However, just as Cyril distorted what Nestorius taught so did Bèza distort what Calvin taught.
45. Whereas as Cyril as able to assign his distortions to Nestorius, so also was Bèza able to assign his distortions to Calvin.
46. And whereas the followers of Cyril's heresy were known as Nestorians, so also are the followers of Bèza's heresy known as Calvinists.
47. It was later discovered that Nestorius had an accurate doctrine of the hypostatic union and was therefore the victim of a conspiracy by Cyril to discredit him.



48. This controversy was also used by Lucifer to discredit the literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutic taught at Antioch and promote the allegorical hermeneutic taught at Alexandria.