



The Association of Hebrew Catholics Lecture  
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# The Messiah of Israel

## **Talk 12. The Heresies of Apollinaris and Nestorius**

## *The Heresy of Apollinaris*

- **Nestorius** (386-451) was reacting against the opposing heresy of **Apollinaris** that denied that Jesus had a human soul and thus denied the true humanity of Christ.
- **Apollinaris of Laodicea** (ca. 300–390) was bishop of that city and a friend of St. Athanasius.
- He always upheld that the Son is consubstantial with the Father, but he held that the divine Logos took the place of a rational soul in Christ.
- He broke with the Church in 375.

## *The Heresy of Apollinaris*

**St. Gregory Nazianzen** summarizes Apollinaris's position as follows:

“He assumes that the man who came down from above is without a mind, but that the Godhead of the only-begotten fulfills the function of mind, and is the third part of this human composite, inasmuch as soul and body are in it on its human side, but not mind, the place of which is taken by God the Word.”

## **According to Apollinaris:**

- Christ would have only a divine intellect and will, and not a human intellect and will.
- The Logos assumed a body animated by a sensitive soul.
- He took too literally the prologue of his Gospel: “The Word was made flesh” (John 1:14).
- According to this heresy, Jesus Christ cannot properly be said to be a human being, but only “like a human being.”

## **According to Apollinaris:**

- The Logos would suffer mutability and interior suffering in the Passion.

**St. Gregory Nazianzen** writes:

“That which is most terrible of all is that he declares that the only-begotten God, the judge of all, the prince of life, the destroyer of death, is mortal, and underwent the Passion in his proper Godhead.”

- Apollinaris does not directly assert this, but Gregory takes it as a necessary consequence of holding that the Logos took the place of Christ’s rational soul.

Apollinaris had two principal reasons for his theory

1) If Christ had a complete human nature, then He would be two distinct subjects or persons: one human and the other divine.

2) Apollinaris thought that a true human intellect and will in Christ would imply:

- conflict between the human and divine wills,
- the possibility of sin and error in Christ's humanity.

- **Apollinaris** thus thought it impossible that Christ could be true God and a complete man in the unity of one person. Therefore he denied that Christ had a complete human nature. Thus He would not be true man.
- He assumed that a true union required that the parts be incomplete in themselves, as are body and soul in man.

- Apollinaris thought that a human intellect and will in Christ could not be in perfect harmony with the divine intellect and will. Thus they must be replaced by the unchangeable Logos. This shows pessimism about the power of grace to transform and sanctify the human will.
- Apollinaris held that Christians are saved by imitating the Logos who completely dominates Christ's flesh, especially in His Passion. But in this view, Christ could not be a model for the Christian, for the Logos could not be tempted.

• Apollinaris was combated by Athanasius, Basil, Gregory of Nazianzen, and Gregory of Nyssa.

1) If Christ did not have a rational human soul, then He would not have been true man.

2) If Christ did not assume a rational human soul, then He would not have redeemed our souls, for He redeemed us by assuming what needed to be redeemed: our bodies and souls in their integrity. Their principle is *that which Christ did not assume is not healed*.

# St. Gregory Nazianzen

“For *that which He has not assumed He has not healed*; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved. If only half Adam fell, then that which Christ assumes and saves may be half also; but if the whole of his nature fell, it must be united to the whole nature of Him that was begotten, and so be saved as a whole.” (Letter 101)

“[Christ] is called man ... that by Himself He may sanctify humanity and be as it were a leaven to the whole lump; and by uniting to Himself that which was condemned may release it from all condemnation, becoming for all men all things that we are, except sin. This includes body, soul, mind.” (Oration 30.21)

- Our intellect and will are what most especially need to be healed, for it is through those faculties that we either sin, or make acts of faith, hope, and charity.
- If Christ did not assume a rational human soul, but only a sensitive soul, then our will would be left unredeemed.

- Apollinaris was condemned by the Council of Constantinople in 381 (Second Ecumenical Council) and by the local Synod of Rome called by Pope Damasus in 382, which declared:

- “We condemn those who say that the Word of God dwelling in human flesh took the place of the rational and spiritual soul, since the Son and the Word of God did not replace the rational and spiritual soul in his body but rather **assumed our soul** (i.e., a rational and spiritual one) **without sin and saved it.**”

# Importance of Jesus' Human Soul

- By taking on a rational human soul, Christ freely merited our redemption and sanctified the human soul. He took on all the dimensions of our human reality except sin so as to sanctify all these realities and be a perfect model for us in them. All of this presupposes the presence of His human soul through which He lived these realities as a human being.

## *Leading to the Nestorian Crisis: Opposing Theological Schools*

- The two great theological schools of that period were **Antioch** and **Alexandria**. Alexandria was led by **St. Athanasius**, and the school of Antioch had Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, St. John Chrysostom, and Theodoret of Cyr.
- The **Antiochean** school emphasized the distinction between the two natures of Christ.
- The **Alexandrian** school emphasized the divinity of Christ in the battle against Arianism, and the unity of Christ, defended by **St. Cyril of Alexandria**.

- **Antioch** so emphasized the distinction of natures that Christ came to be considered as two persons: the man Jesus Christ, and the divine Word.
- **Alexandria** could so emphasize the union of the two natures that the distinction of the natures was lost. This danger would later come to light in the fourth ecumenical council with the **Monophysite heresy** and Dioscorus.

• **The third ecumenical council** revealed the weakness of the approach of **Antioch**, and the **fourth** that of **Alexandria**.

• **Catholic truth** is marked by an attitude that can be described as “both/and” rather than “either/or.” **Heresies** have the attitude of “either/or” taken to a logical extreme.

- We can see the danger of “**party spirit.**” The deposit of faith is above theological schools and labels like “left” and “right,” “Democrat” and “Republican,” etc.
- The Catholic faith is not “from below” but “from above,” even though it must be worked out through theological systems, each of which will grasp a part of the truth while missing other aspects.

- The danger of **party spirit** does not mean that one should tolerate all theological positions.
- We should fight against theological deviations fostered by excessive party spirit.
- The theologian should keep himself firmly grounded in charity, humility, and love for the truth. As Aristotle once said: “Plato is a friend, but truth is a greater friend.”

**Diodore, Bishop of Tarsus**, was a biblical scholar of Antioch.

- He opposed **Apollinaris** by speaking about Christ as **two sons**: the son of man and the Son of God.
- Diodore held that Christ is two Sons who are intimately associated with each other.
- He thinks that the two Sons can be spoken of as one on account of the intimacy of the association.

This teaching of Diodore is a foundation for the position of Nestorius. **St. Cyril of Alexandria** writes:

“A certain Diodore . . . wrote that he who was born of the line of David from the holy virgin was one distinct son, and the Word of God the Father was again another and quite distinct son. . . . Nestorius became this man’s pupil and . . . he also pretends to confess one Christ and Son and Lord, though he too has divided the One and Indivisible into two. He says that man has been conjoined to God the Word by a shared name, by equality of honour, and by dignity.”

## **St. Gregory Nazianzen:**

“God is dishonored by the view that he was not born for us at all, nor nailed to the cross, and, obviously, was neither buried nor arose, as some perverse “lovers of Christ” have thought, but receives honor only here on earth, where honor is in reality dishonor. The result is that he is cut, or combined, into two sons.”

**St. Augustine:** “But the very same one is the Son of man who is also the Son of God. For by adhering to the unity of person, the Son of man with the Son of God was made one person; and the Son of God is the same person as the Son of man.”

**Again:** “As Word, He is equal with the Father; as man, less than the Father. One Son of God, and at the same time Son of man; one Son of man, and at the same time Son of God; not two Sons of God, God and man, but one Son of God: God without beginning; man with a beginning, our Lord Jesus Christ.”

**Theodore of Mopsuestia and St. John Chrysostom,** are the leading theologians of the Antiochean school of theology.

- Theodore was accused by many of providing the basis for Nestorianism, and 125 years after his death his works were condemned and he was anathematized by the Second Council of Constantinople (AD 553).
- Theodore speaks of the union between Jesus and the Logos principally in terms of indwelling. He says that the Logos indwells in Christ “as in a son.”

- **Theodore** sees Christ as an intimate union between two subjects.
- He says that Christ “was **urged on by the Logos** and strengthened for the perfect fulfillment of what was fitting.”
- To say that Christ was “urged on by the Logos” seems to imply that He is not properly the Logos, but a distinct subject.

## Theodore:

“He himself [i.e. the Word] was not tried with the trial of death, but he was **near to him** and doing to him the things that were congruous to his nature as the maker who is the cause of everything.”

- God is likewise very “near” to the martyrs in their sufferings, through which they are brought to glory.

# Nestorius

- The heresy of **Nestorianism** was begun by Nestorius, the patriarch of Constantinople.
- Since Constantinople was considered the “new Rome” and the Byzantine Emperors also ruled from there, the political and the religious spheres tended to get confused.
- Nestorius saw his position as a mandate to enforce his own particular school of theology as the norm for the Christian world.

“**Nestorius** had an associate whom he had brought from Antioch, a presbyter named Anastasius; for this man he had the highest esteem, and consulted him in the management of his most important affairs. This Anastasius preaching one day in the church said, “Let no one call Mary *Theotokos*: for Mary was but a woman; and it is impossible that God should be born of a woman.”

Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History* 7.32

- This heresy deeply upset the piety of the faithful.
- **Nestorius** denied the unity of person in Christ.
- **He upheld the true distinction of the humanity and the divinity in Christ.** He upheld the divinity of the Logos (against Arius), and the true and full humanity of Jesus (against Apollinaris).
- While upholding this distinction of natures, he was not able to maintain the unity of Christ's Person.

## Nestorius, *First Sermon Against the Theotokos*

**Nestorius** writes: “Does God have a mother? . . . Mary, my friend, did not give birth to the Godhead for “what is born of flesh is flesh” (John 3:6). . . . A creature did not produce the Creator, rather she gave birth to the human being, the instrument of the Godhead.”

## Nestorius, *First Sermon Against the Theotokos*

“Rather, he formed out of the Virgin a temple for God the Logos, a temple in which he dwelt.

“Moreover, the incarnate God did not die; he raised up the one in whom he was incarnate. He stooped down to raise up what had collapsed, but he did not fall. . . . The burial belonged to this man, not to the deity. . . .

## Nestorius, *First Sermon Against the Theotokos*

“That which was formed in the womb is not in itself God. That which was created by the Spirit was not in itself God. That which was buried in the tomb was not in itself God. If that were the case, we should manifestly be worshipers of a human being and worshipers of the dead. But since God is within the one who was assumed, the one who was assumed is styled God because of the one who assumed him.”

- **Nestorius** said that Mary could not be the mother of God because God is without origin.
- Because of a deficient philosophy, Nestorius did not distinguish between **person** and **nature**.
- “**Person**” is an individual *subject* who exists (or subsists) in a rational nature; it answers the question: **Who** is this? The answer is the name of an acting subject.
- “**Nature**” is what a thing is, and answers the question: **What** is this? The answer is “human and divine.”

- **Natures are abstract** in that they refer to a **principle of being and action**. Nature is an intrinsic principle of movement and operation. They do not have being in themselves, but individual subjects have being in them.
- **Persons**, on the contrary, are concrete and are the subjects of action. Persons act through their nature.
- Christ is one acting subject who exists and acts in and through two infinitely distinct natures.

- Among created things, only rational beings—angels and men—are persons.
- No created being has more than one nature, or is more than one person. That is why Nestorius assumed that nature and person always go together. Since Christ has two complete and infinitely distinct natures, he assumed there must be two subjects of action, or persons.

- Nestorius later introduced an **intermediate reality** which he speaks of as a kind of **composite “subject of union,”** which he refers to as Christ.
- Insofar as Christ’s acts manifest the divinity through miracles and teaching, resurrection, and ascension, we can speak of one composite “person” acting. In this way Nestorius sought to overcome the dualism of “two sons,” for which he was accused.
- Now Christ would be three persons or sons.

## *Nestorianism*

- Nestorius's mature system thus involved three subjects or persons: **the Logos (divine Person), the man Jesus (human person), and Christ as a *composite person* manifesting the action of God through the human person.**

## *Nestorianism*

- Christ would be the human person acting in concert with the divine Person. That would be a **union of wills**, a *voluntary union*, rather than an *ontological* union.
- **Christ would be a “temple for God the Logos**, a temple in which he dwelt.” This is not false, for Christ speaks of His Body as the true Temple.
- But this language could apply to all the saints. It fails to distinguish Christ as the “only-begotten” Son, as the very Word, and not just the temple of the Word.

# *Nestorianism*

## **Nestorius denied that**

- it could be said that God was born of Mary;
- that God Incarnate suffered and died on the Cross;
- that God was buried; etc.

## **Nestorius holds that God was**

- *in* the one who was born of Mary,
- *in* him who died on the Cross and raised from the dead.

But the Holy Trinity dwells in all those in grace (**John 14:23**): “If a man loves me . . . we will come to him and make our home with him.”

## *Nestorianism*

- **Nestorius rejected the titles of Christ that speak of a “sharing of properties”** that put together human and divine attributes of Christ, such as “*Theotokos*” and “**Passion of God.**” These titles point out that Christ is one subject (person) in two natures.
- **Cyril of Alexandria** insisted on the truth and central importance of this “sharing of properties” by which both divine and human attributes are attributed to one subject, Jesus Christ.

## *Nestorianism*

- Many today also see Christ as the holiest of men and great moral teacher, but not a divine Person.
- However, His absolute holiness and obedience are a consequence of the hypostatic union, and not what constitutes it, according to the principle that *action follows on being*.

## Opposition to Nestorius: Proclus (later Patriarch of Constantinople)

“For the same one was in the “Father’s bosom” and in the Virgin’s womb, in his mother’s arms and on the “wings of the wind,” adored by angels and “dining with tax collectors.” Seraphim would not look at him, and “Pilate interrogated him.” A “servant struck him,” and creation trembled. While nailed on the cross, he did not depart from his throne; while shut in the tomb, he was “stretching out the heavens like a curtain:” while numbered with the dead, he was plundering Hades.”

## *St. Cyril of Alexandria*

- **St. Cyril:** “I am astonished that the question should ever have been raised as to whether the Holy Virgin should be called Mother of God, for it really amounts to asking, is her Son God, or is He not?”
- **Cyril** pointed out that although God is incapable of suffering in His divine nature, He assumed a human nature to suffer in it for us. “He surrendered his own body to death even though by nature he is life and is himself the Resurrection” (John 11:25).

• **Pope St. Celestine** declared Nestorius's doctrine heretical and authorized Cyril to give Nestorius ten days to recant. If Nestorius refused, he was to be excommunicated and Cyril was to name another patriarch to Constantinople.

• This decision of Rome was understood by Rome and St. Cyril as an infallible judgment that needed no further ratification.

# *Council of Ephesus*

- The Eastern Emperor **Theodosius II** refused to acknowledge the decision of Pope Celestine. He called an ecumenical council, which was accepted by Pope Celestine in the interests of unity.
- The council was held in **Ephesus**, the city graced by the presence of the Mother of God, and in the basilica dedicated to the Mother of God.
- St. Cyril began the Council before the bishops from Antioch, who were very sympathetic to Nestorius, had arrived, although they were only a week away.

## Council of Ephesus

- The Council lasted one day. The Second Letter of Cyril to Nestorius and the Twelve Anathemas of Cyril against Nestorius were approved.
- Nestorius was deposed as an unrepentant heretic.
- This Second Letter of Cyril to Nestorius affirms the hypostatic union as the key to defending the mystery of Christ.

## Second Letter of St. Cyril against Nestorius

“The Word, **hypostatically** uniting to himself the flesh animated by a rational soul, became man in an ineffable and incomprehensible manner and was called Son of man, not merely by will or good pleasure or because he only assumed a person. Furthermore, we say that the natures brought together in real union are different and from these two **only one Christ and Son results, not as though the difference of the natures was suppressed by the union,** but rather, because the **divinity and the humanity have formed for us only one Lord and Christ and Son** by their ineffable and mysterious coming together in unity.”

## Second Letter of St. Cyril against Nestorius

“For this was not an ordinary man who was at first begotten of the holy Virgin, and then the Word descended upon him: rather, the Word united flesh to himself from his mother’s womb and is said to have undergone begetting in the flesh in order to take to himself flesh of his own. . . . For this reason the holy Fathers have not hesitated to speak of the holy Virgin as the **Mother of God**, not certainly because the nature of the Word or his divinity had the origin of its being from the holy Virgin, but because from her was generated his holy body, animated by a rational soul, a body hypostatically united to the Word; and thus it is said that the Word was begotten according to the flesh.”

- *Hypostasis* is the Greek term for “person,” and thus “hypostatically” means “personally” or “in [the unity of] His Person.”
- We cannot say that the Word assumed a human *person*, for there is only one Person in Christ, who is the divine eternal Person of the Word.
- There never was a moment in which the humanity of Jesus was autonomous and did not belong to the divine Person of the Word.

- **The union between the two natures of Christ is in the Person of the Word** who assumed the human nature “in the fullness of time.”
- **The two natures remain infinitely distinct but are brought together in one person** or individual subject, which in Greek is expressed by saying that the union is in the hypostasis.
- **“Hypostatic union”** means *union in the person* and describes the ineffable union between the two natures in the one person of Christ.

**St. Cyril** wrote:

“The entire population of the city stood from dawn to dusk waiting for the decision of the holy council. When they heard that the wretched man was deposed, they all began, with one voice, to cry out in praise of the holy council, glorifying God because the enemy of the faith had fallen. When we came out of the church they made a procession ahead of us to the lodging house . . . and even the women came out carrying incense to perfume the path before us.”

# Formula of Reunion

“We acknowledge that our Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, *perfect God and perfect man*, composed of a rational soul and body, was begotten of the Father before the ages in respect to his divinity, but in the final days the same was born for our sake and for our salvation of the Virgin Mary in respect to his humanity; he is **consubstantial with the Father** in respect to his divinity and **consubstantial with us** in respect to his humanity. For a union of two natures has taken place; due to it we acknowledge **one Christ, one Son, one Lord**. In accordance with this understanding of the **unmixed union**, we acknowledge that the holy Virgin is the **God-bearer** because the God-Word took flesh and became man, and, from his very conception, he made one with himself the temple taken from her.”

# Implications of the Condemnation of Nestorianism

- The Council of Ephesus gave great impetus to Marian devotion, which was already flourishing in the Church, but was now greatly strengthened by the victory over the Nestorian crisis.
- Marian devotion protects Christological dogma. Heresy with regard to Christ generally ends up putting Christ in the position in which the Church places Mary.

# Implications of the Condemnation of Nestorianism

- The Nestorian heresy would make man's salvation through the work of Christ impossible. **Christ worked our salvation because He is one Person in two natures**, man and God. As man He could suffer and merit our salvation as Head of the human race, freely putting down His life for our redemption. As God, His sacrifice and other human actions have an infinite value and dignity.
- Christ's human nature is capable of being the perfect mediator between God and man because it is the humanity of a divine Person.

# Implications of the Condemnation of Nestorianism

- As man He is in solidarity with every man by sharing our humanity, and as God He elevates our humanity by giving us a share in His divinity. Sanctifying grace, which we receive in Baptism, the Eucharist, and the other sacraments, is a “partaking of the divine nature” and the divine life. Christ works this divinization in us because He Himself is both God and man joined in the closest possible union—a union in one Person (the hypostatic union).

# Implications of the Condemnation of Nestorianism

- St. Cyril's theology gives great importance to the Eucharist, through which we receive the very Body of Him who is the life. The Eucharist is life-giving because the subject we receive is the Giver of life, the Logos.
- Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Unity of Christ*, 60: "For how could his body possibly give life to us if it were not the very own body of him who is Life?"
- Because of the hypostatic union, Christ's sacrifice shows us that God has "loved us to the end."

# Implications of the Condemnation of Nestorianism

- Some object that the first six ecumenical Councils excessively “hellenized” Christian doctrine by using Greek philosophy to define the Blessed Trinity and the Incarnation, which are the deepest and most fundamental mysteries of the faith.
- But the Church has not “hellenized” the faith; she has continually defended the faith by making use of the perennial philosophy of the human mind, generally against inadequate philosophies put in service of some heresy.

# Implications of the Condemnation of Nestorianism

- The development of the notion of personhood is a good example of how Christian Revelation has stimulated philosophical thought. Theologians like St. Cyril were forced to work out a notion of personhood that indicates an individual subject who is complete and continuous in different states and in history.
- For St. Cyril, a person is an acting individual subject who can say “I.” A person is an acting subject who is *incommunicable* (can’t belong to another).

# Jesus uses one “I” to speak of His human and divine being

- That Christ has two natures *in the unity of one (divine) subject or Person* is clear from the way Christ speaks of Himself in the Gospels. Christ uses one and the same “I” to speak of attributes that belong to Him from His humanity, and those that belong to Him from His divinity. For example, He says, “I thirst,” which belongs to Him in His humanity, and He says, “Before Abraham was, I am”; or “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” Christ is the “way” in His humanity, but the *truth* and the *life* in His divinity. The heresy of Nestorius is completely incompatible with Jesus’ way of speaking of Himself.

# Sharing of the Properties

- Micah 5:1 says that the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem, and yet His origin is “from eternity.”
- In Isaiah 9:5, the Messiah is said to be “a son who is born to us,” who is at the same time, “mighty God.” He is “a son born to us” in His humanity, and “mighty God” in His divinity.
- Isaiah 7:14 speaks of the Messiah as “Emmanuel,” God with us. His divinity is “with us” through His human nature which enabled Him to walk the streets of Israel.
- The first verse of Psalm 110 also shows the *sharing of the properties*: “The Lord says to my lord: ‘Sit at my right hand.’” He is Lord through His divinity, but sits at the right hand of the Father in His exalted humanity.

# Sharing of the Properties

Philippians 2:5–11: “Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”

- It is the same subject who existed eternally as God (in the form of God), emptied Himself by assuming a created human nature (“taking the form of a servant”), who “humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross,” and was then glorified in His Resurrection and Ascension.