

PERSONALITY AND TERMINOLOGY:
THE NESTORIAN CONTROVERSY

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Among the theological controversies of the Patristic age of the church, the Nestorian controversy was one of the most unpleasant. It was driven by a concern for orthodoxy, but was also fed by personal ambition and politics. Confusion about the meaning of terminology important to the discussion thwarted the development of mutual understanding and prevented reaching a resolution peacefully. In spite of the unhappy circumstances surrounding the controversy, however, it forced the church to expand on the undefined terminology of the Nicene Creed and develop a fuller understanding of the union of the divine and human in Jesus Christ. Indirectly it also provided a lesson for the church in listening carefully to and trying to understand those with whom we disagree theologically.

The Nestorian controversy arose in the post-Nicene century. The Nicene Creed had encoded the belief that Jesus was both fully human and fully divine. However, there was room for interpretation in the creedal statements surrounding the divine and human natures of Christ: the Creed, by nature a brief statement, did not indicate *how* the divine and human natures come together in Christ. The Nestorian controversy was at root based on the question of how to explain this unity.

This Christological controversy was named after Nestorius, bishop of Constantinople, who was excommunicated in 431 for his alleged teachings.¹ Nestorius was Antiochene in his theology, stressing the human side of Jesus, and so tended to separate the divine and human in Jesus.² This was done in order to avoid the concern that Christ's divine nature (being divine) so overwhelms his human nature that it is, in effect, absorbed by the divine. The Antiochenes

¹ There is still some question as to whether Nestorius was himself a Nestorian. See Carl E. Braaten, "Modern Interpretations of Nestorius," in *Church History* 32 (Spring 1963), 251-267, for a survey of modern opinions on Nestorius' orthodoxy.

² Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity: Volume I: to A.D. 1500* (New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 1975), 165.

stressed Christ's human nature because they believed it was only in becoming fully human that Christ was able to save humanity—if Jesus was in fact just divinity with some flesh on he was not really human and the salvation of humanity was in jeopardy.³ This was the “Word-man” stream of Christology: that the *Logos* united himself with a complete human being, body and soul.⁴ Critics of the Antiochene Christological position were concerned that they separated the divine and human in Jesus to such an extent that they ultimately believed in two separate persons in Christ.

Nestorius' adversary was Cyril, bishop of Alexandria, who as well was a theological Alexandrian. The Alexandrians stressed the divine side of Jesus over his human side. Alexandrian Christology was in the “Word-flesh” stream, which understood the *Logos* to have united with human flesh, but that Jesus did not have a human soul.⁵ As such, Cyril and the Alexandrians' Christological position tended to allow Jesus' divine nature to overcome his human nature.⁶ This was, naturally, of great concern to the Antiochenes' human-focused Christology. Interestingly, Cyril, too, insisted that in order for Jesus to affect our salvation he would need fully to partake in the human experience,⁷ but he would have had a different understanding of how that participation took place.

Underlying these divergent Christological views was a difference in scriptural interpretation. The Alexandrians read scripture allegorically, so the *teachings* of scripture were to

³ Justo González, *The Story of Christianity, Volume I: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation* (New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 1984), 253.

⁴ Richard Kyle, “Nestorius: The Partial Rehabilitation of a Heretic,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 32/1 (March 1989): 76.

⁵ Kyle, “Nestorius”, 76.

⁶ Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, 165.

⁷ Norman Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000), 44.

them more important than the *events* of scripture. It was natural, then, for Alexandrian theologians to be less concerned with the human side of Jesus,⁸ and they were also willing to embrace the mystery of the incarnation.

Conversely, Antiochenes were quite strictly literalist in terms of Biblical interpretation, so the historical Jesus was for them of great importance: if he was the saviour of humanity then he would have to be human through and through.⁹ Concern with a strictly historical understanding of Jesus would also make the notion of the mystery of the incarnation an uncomfortable one for them. In fact, Cyril argues that by not accepting that the birth of the Word was like any human's birth, Nestorius "destroy[s] the mystery of the economy of the flesh."¹⁰ The union in Christ is, according to Cyril, "a real union transcending our understanding and expression."¹¹ Clearly, however, Cyril thought that this union needed to be expressed in *some* fashion, and that, mystery or no mystery, Nestorius' expression of this union was incorrect.

The controversy began in response to Nestorius' disapproval of the term *Theotokos* ("Mother of God") as a title for the Virgin Mary. In *The Bazaar of Heraclides*, a defence of his Christological position written years after the controversy had settled and he had been exiled, Nestorius claimed that when he arrived to take up his position as bishop of Constantinople there was already division in that city's church about whether Mary should properly be called *Theotokos* or *Anthropotokos* ("Mother of man").¹² Nestorius was asked to make a ruling on the

⁸ Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 252.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ P.E. Pusey, *Epistolae tres eocumenicae, Libri quinque contra Nestorium, XII capitum explanatio, XII capitum defensio ultraque, Scholia de Incarnatione Unigeniti*, vol. 6, Oxford: James Parker (reprinted Brussels 1965), 18; quoted in Norman Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria* (London, UK: Routledge, 2000), 44-45.

¹¹ Pusey, *Epistolae*, 85; quoted in Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*, 45.

terminology:¹³ “Gathering both parties together, I suggested that she should be called Mother of Christ [*Christotokos*], a term which represented both God and man, as it is used in the gospels.”¹⁴ In other words, *Christotokos* was, in his view, more scriptural than *Theotokos*. Nestorius was dubious about the term *Theotokos*: Mary could not have bore God, God could not have incubated for nine months in Mary’s womb, could not have been wrapped in babies’ clothes, could not have suffered and died, and so on.¹⁵ Nestorius saw in the term *Theotokos* a dangerous similarity to the Arian belief of Jesus as a mere creature, the underpinnings of the semi-human Jesus of Apollinarianism,¹⁶ as well as an affinity with pagan myths of women giving birth to gods.¹⁷

In Nestorius’ view, the notion of Mary giving birth to God would overwhelm any humanity which Jesus might have had, and as an Antiochene argued that the term should be balanced out with “man-bearer”, in an effort to preserve Jesus’ humanity.¹⁸ This was understood by Cyril to mean a separation of the divine and human in Jesus, so that Mary essentially gave birth to two sons, one human and one divine.¹⁹ However, this might simply have been a balancing move on Nestorius’ part, rather than a theological statement, because he ultimately argued for the use of the term *Christotokos* as removing all doubts in terms of what and whom

¹² Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition, Volume I: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)* Second Edition. (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1975), 451.

¹³ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, Revised Edition (New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 1978), 311.

¹⁴ F. Loofs, *Nestoriana*, Halle, 1905; quoted in Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition, Volume I: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)* Second Edition. (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1975), 451.

¹⁵ Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 311.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Carl E. Braaten, “Modern Interpretations of Nestorius,” *Church History* 32 (Spring 1963): 252.

¹⁸ Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 254.

¹⁹ Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 311.

Mary bore.²⁰ From this perspective, it appears as if Nestorius is arguing for the birth of the God-man as a sort of middle-ground between the two extremes,²¹ rather than suggesting that Mary gave birth to one of each, God *and* a man. This was not technically an unorthodox view given the Nicene Creed's "fully God and fully man".

Cyril and the Alexandrians thought the term *Theotokos* was a perfectly natural designation for Mary, particularly in light of the belief that the properties of the divine and human in Jesus could be said to apply to each other, such that the divine properties could apply to the human and the human properties could apply to the divine (known as "*communicato idiomatum*"). Since the divine properties could be applied to the human Jesus, it was quite proper to refer to Mary having given birth to God.²²

Nestorius and the Antiochenes did not disagree with the doctrine of *communicato idiomatum*, but thought that this could just as well apply to the human nature of Christ, so that saying Mary gave birth to a man was just as proper.²³ In the *Bazaar of Heraclides*, Nestorius describes his own position in a way which draws on the same principle:

The dweller is he who dwells in him who serves him as a dwelling, and he has his *prosōpon*, while he who serves as a dwelling has the *prosōpon* of him who dwells. So by the use of their *prosōpa*, as though they were making use of their own properties in an authoritative way, the former is the latter and the latter is the former, the former and the latter abiding just as they are in their natures.²⁴

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, Volume III: Nicene and Post-Nicene Christianity, from Constantine the Great to Gregory the Great A.D. 311-600* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1910), 717.

²² Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 311.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Nestorius, *Book of Heraclides*, 324-325; quoted in Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*, 43.

Cyril's concern with Nestorius' position is that he appeared to maintain a distinction between the persons (i.e., the dweller and the one in whom the dweller dwells). While they maintain their own natures, Nestorius also implied that somehow the two persons are essentially one. This was Nestorius' "indivisible conjunction," with which Cyril could not come to grips. Cyril wondered if a conjunction (as opposed a union) was enough to warrant worship of the man Jesus, who did not, in Cyril's understanding of Nestorius' position, receive enough divinity from the divine person to be considered God.²⁵

There appears to have been a failure on the part of all the parties involved to fully grasp what the other was saying. In retrospect, this was to be expected, because "[a]ll the trinitarian and Christological controversies were complicated by imprecise terminological definitions."²⁶ The essential words in the debate were *ousia*, *physis*, *hypostasis*, and *prosopon*, and all four terms were interrelated. *Physis* could have a similar meaning to both *ousia* ("substance", "essence", "the irreducible being of something") and *hypostasis* ("support", "subsistent entity", "concrete reality"), but *ousia* and *hypostasis* were not themselves directly similar words. *Prosopon* ("individual self," "concrete representation of an abstract *ousia*") could at times be related to *hypostasis*, but not always.²⁷

It is quite clear, then, that the key words in the Christological discussion did not have a distinct definition.²⁸ Cyril and Nestorius' use of these words varied from each other and fluctuated in meaning:

The Cappadocians had spoken of one *ousia* in three *hypostaseis*, which after Chalcedon was to become the accepted terminology, *physis* being understood as synonymous with

²⁵ Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*, 44.

²⁶ Carl E. Braaten, "Modern Interpretations of Nestorius," 256.

²⁷ Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*, 40.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

ousia and *prosōpon* with *hypostasis*. In Cyril’s usage, however, *physis* is equivalent to *hypostasis* and means a concrete individual reality, so that Cyril can speak indifferently of a single incarnate *physis* or a single incarnate *hypostasis* of God the Word, which Nestorius, understanding *physis* and *hypostasis* in terms of *ousia*, interpreted in an Apollinarian sense. Conversely, Nestorius’ talk of two *prosōpa*, meaning two different roles, forming a prosopic union by conjunction, seemed to Cyril to entail two sons, one human and one divine, for he understood *prosōpon* in terms of *hypostasis*.²⁹

As it was, in using the term *prosopon*, Nestorius did not mean “person” in the normal sense, but rather “the notion of an ‘external undivided appearance’” and he understood every “nature” to have a corresponding “person” in this sense.³⁰ Nestorius argued that in Jesus there were two natures as well as two persons: one divine and one human—the latter was born of Mary, the former was not.³¹ This is a necessary conclusion for Nestorius, as he was concerned that the Godhead could not have come into being in the manner being born as a normal human insinuates.

What is difficult to determine, however, is what, precisely, Nestorius meant by the terms “person” and “nature”.³² The two natures of Christ remain, in Nestorius’ thinking, distinct. However, when speaking of the *person* of Christ, Nestorius believed that while there were two persons in Jesus—one divine and one human—there is only one Christ:³³ the two persons are somehow united, yet distinct, in the one person of Christ. Cyril, on the other hand, appeared to argue for a Christ as a single person with a single nature. While he was willing to recognize the distinction between the divine and the human,³⁴ *in Christ* these two natures become one—as

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Braaten, “Modern Interpretations of Nestorius,” 256.

³¹ Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 254.

³² Ibid.

³³ Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 314.

Christ there is only one nature, both human and divine.³⁵ Both men appear to be doing something similar with the terminology: Nestorius says that out of two persons, one divine and one human, we have one person in Christ—both divine and human at once. Cyril does a similar thing with the natures: in Christ we have one nature both divine and human out of two natures, one divine and one human.

The reconciliation established at the council of Chalcedon (451) has been cited as a victory for the Antiochene Christology.³⁶ In fact, Nestorius himself considered it a “vindication” of his position, even as it confirmed his excommunication.³⁷ Yet it seems that both parties had to make concessions to the other. The Chalcedonian formula strongly affirms the Antiochenes when it states that

[We also teach] that we apprehend this one and only Christ...in two natures...without confusing the two natures, without transmuting one nature into the other, without dividing them into two separate categories, without contrasting them according to area or function. The distinctiveness of each nature is not nullified by the union.³⁸

But the Alexandrians are recognized as well: “the ‘properties’ of each nature are conserved and both natures concur in one ‘person’ and in one *hypostasis*. They are not divided or cut into two... [persons], but are together one and only and only-begotten Logos of God.”³⁹

The irony is that “neither of these contestants doubted the two postulates that Jesus Christ is both truly God and truly man. Both of these men recognized Christ as embodying one

³⁴ Ibid., 313.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 341.

³⁷ Braaten, “Modern Interpretations of Nestorius,” 252.

³⁸ John H. Lieth, ed., *Creeds of the Churches*, 3rd edition, translated by Albert C. Outler (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1982), 35-36; quoted in William C. Placher, *Readings in the History of Christian Theology, Volume 1: From Its Beginnings to the Eve of the Reformation* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1988), 75.

³⁹ Ibid.

person”.⁴⁰ In this sense, both men fell within the bounds of the Nicene Creed and the term “heresy” technically did not apply to either man’s view. However, “neither of them thought that the other party’s view could fulfill all the accepted conditions” of the Nicene Creed.⁴¹

It was not only terminological confusion which has made Nestorius’ orthodoxy difficult to determine. If there is one area of the Nestorian controversy in which historians tend to agree, it is that it was driven as much by political interest and personality as by concern for doctrinal fidelity. “At no phase in the evolution of the Church’s theology have the fundamental issues been so mixed up with in the clash of politics and personalities.”⁴² At the council at Constantinople in 381, the city of Constantinople had been given ecclesiastical powers over the east similar to the powers Rome had in the west.⁴³ The churches at Alexandria and Antioch both opposed this move, being older churches and having deeper roots than the relative newcomer of Constantinople.

However, this disagreement with the division of power did not unite Alexandria and Antioch, as might have been expected, as both churches would have claimed those powers for themselves. As a result, the two sees tried to influence the elections in the bishopric of Constantinople in hopes of the election of a bishop sympathetic to their theology. The Antiochenes managed to have the most influence in this respect, with the bishop of Constantinople generally being an Antiochene.⁴⁴ The theological differences between the Alexandrians and Antiochenes, coupled with the reluctance of the Alexandrians to be under the

⁴⁰ Kyle, “Nestorius: The Partial Rehabilitation of a Heretic,” 77.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 310.

⁴³ Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 253.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 254.

final judgement of the relatively new see of Constantinople, instilled deep suspicion of Constantinople by Alexandrian bishops.⁴⁵

It was in this hostile and suspicious climate that Nestorius was appointed bishop of Constantinople. Cyril was roused to action when Nestorius decided to respond to a series of complaints he had received about Cyril. “The occasion of the Nestorian controversy,” writes Richard Kyle, “was the fact that four Alexandrians had gone to Theodosius II and complained of the way in which their bishop was treating them.”⁴⁶ Around that time, with Cyril’s watchful eye already on him, Nestorius began questioning the use of the title *Theotokos* in reference to Mary.

Nestorius’ public disapproval of the term *Theotokos* was Cyril’s chance to undermine the Antiochene influence in Constantinople. The rumour was spread that Nestorius did not believe in the divinity of Jesus, hence putting his orthodoxy in question. Henry Chadwick goes so far as to use the language of conspiracy: “Cyril’s agents in Constantinople fostered [...] opposition there, putting about that Nestorius disliked the title ‘Mother of God’ because he did not believe that Jesus was God.”⁴⁷ This was not true. In fact, Nestorius was not teaching anything innovative. Rather, Nestorius was standing in the tradition of Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia’s teaching, and neither of them had been accused or suspected of heresy.⁴⁸ Nestorius was also accused of being an adoptionist in the tradition of Paul of Samosata, believing that God had merely taken up the body of the man Jesus. This position was also denied and rejected by Nestorius.⁴⁹ It is clear that Cyril was running a smear campaign against Nestorius.

⁴⁵ Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, 167.

⁴⁶ Kyle, “Nestorius: The Partial Rehabilitation of a Heretic,” 74.

⁴⁷ Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 1993), 195.

⁴⁸ Kyle, “Nestorius: The Partial Rehabilitation of a Heretic,” 74.

Kelly argues that Cyril was ultimately moved by concern for orthodoxy, but that in itself does not justify either Cyril's methods or his theology. Nestorius was also concerned about doctrinal fidelity, but his *expression* of that concern was what cast suspicion on him in the first place. That Cyril maintained and dispersed claims against Nestorius in the face of Nestorius' denials lends some truth to the suggestion that Cyril was "moved not only by theological conviction, but also, perhaps unconsciously or half-consciously, by ambition for leadership in the Catholic Church for himself and his see and by jealousy of the other great episcopal sees of the East, Antioch and Constantinople, both of them occupied by men who endorsed views from which he sharply dissented."⁵⁰

Nestorius' motivation was not altogether pure either. Pulcheria, the emperor's sister, who had some significant sway over the leader, did not care for Nestorius. At one point Nestorius barred Pulcheria from taking communion in the manner of the clergy and emperors as she was accustomed to doing:

Nestorius said to that no would woman would enter [the sanctuary]. 'Why?' she demanded. 'Have I not given birth to God?' – if a woman had given birth to God, surely a woman could enter the sanctuary, especially one whose consecrated virginity assimilated her to the Mother of God.⁵¹

Russell places this event early in Nestorius' tenure in Constantinople, so it is not unreasonable to think that an event such as this would have fuelled Nestorius' passions.

The road to reconciliation (if it can be called that) and unity was no more admirable than these early events in the controversy. Cyril behaved like a bully for much of the process. He wrote to Pope Celestine in Rome about Nestorius' rumoured heretical teaching. In a synod in

⁴⁹ Braaten, "Modern Interpretations of Nestorius," 254.

⁵⁰ Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, 166.

⁵¹ Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*, 32.

Rome it was decided that Nestorius was to be excommunicated unless he recanted of Nestorius' views as they had been presented to the pope by Cyril. Celestine wrote a letter to Nestorius expressing his views and demands of Nestorius, to which Cyril attached his own twelve anathemas,⁵² which directly challenged not only Nestorius' views but Antiochene views in general, and insisted that Nestorius agree to them.⁵³ This upset the Antiochene patriarchs and eventually led to the ecumenical council at Ephesus, but there, too, Cyril acted with a strong political bent.

Cyril was in charge of the proceedings at the council of Ephesus. He closely followed the rules of procedure for councils,⁵⁴ but he seemed to push the boundaries as much as he could and certainly used the rules in his favour. Cyril chose to proceed with the council even though neither the Antiochene delegates nor the Pope's representatives had arrived. Nestorius was in Ephesus, but refused to participate in the council. Socrates Scholasticus, a contemporary historian, recorded that Nestorius made an appearance early on, but, after declaring that "I cannot term him God who was two and three months old. I am therefore clear of your blood, and shall in future come no more among you," he left the council and refused to participate any further.⁵⁵

With many of the expected Antiochene bishops absent from the proceedings, including some who were abstaining in protest, Cyril managed to receive support for his position from all of those present (who, presumably, were for the most part already his supporters) and they

⁵² J.F.X. Murphy, "Pope St. Celestine I," *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908); available from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03477c.htm>; Internet; last accessed October 30, 2009

⁵³ Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 324-325.

⁵⁴ Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*, 46, 47.

⁵⁵ Socrates Scholasticus, "Chapter XXXIV.—Synod at Ephesus against Nestorius. His Deposition," *The Ecclesiastical History of Socrates Scholasticus* [document online]; available from <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf202.ii.x.xxxiv.html>; Internet; last accessed October 30, 2009.

unanimously deposed Nestorius.⁵⁶ When Nestorius' supporters from the east arrived late, they were incensed at what had transpired and convened a council of their own, excommunicating Cyril as well as another bishop. Emperor Theodosius then annulled the decisions of both meetings and insisted that the two parties reconvene a joint council to sort everything out, but both sides refused.⁵⁷ It is not clear, then, to what extent Nestorius' excommunication at this council was binding or even legitimate.

Unity within the church was ultimately achieved by each party conceding some theological ground to the other party, as well as at the cost of Nestorius' acceptance in the church. John of Antioch, ostensibly one of Nestorius' supporters, agreed to the acceptability of the title *Theotokos* and, reluctantly, to declare Nestorius anathema.⁵⁸ Cyril had to affirm that in Christ there was the union of two natures, one human and one divine,⁵⁹ rather than one hybrid divine-human nature. Chalcedon, as mentioned above, affirmed Nestorius' excommunication as well as many of the elements of the agreement between the Antiochene and Alexandrian bishops.

The Nestorian controversy, whether Nestorius himself was a Nestorian or not, was important on a Christological level in terms of explaining the relation of the divine and human in Christ, so far as that is possible: Christ in one person with two natures, one human and one divine, and the implications which follow, such as the suffering of the human nature on the cross, rather than the divine. If orthodoxy historically marks the line between two divergent views, then the Chalcedonian confession indicates once again that the Nestorian controversy falls in this tradition. In this case, however, it seems that the views in question were not as divergent as in

⁵⁶ Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*, 49-50

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 56

⁵⁹ Chadwick, *The Early Church*, 199.

other cases. Cyril and Nestorius certainly identified the potential for extreme and potentially heretical views in each other's positions, but they did not fundamentally disagree about Christ. Their disagreement was at root about how the divine and human come together and relate in the person of Jesus Christ. This had soteriological implications: to what extent was either the divine or human in Christ necessary to effect the salvation of humankind? The answer, according to Chalcedon, is that both are equally needed.

There arises out of this controversy also the question of what is required for an individual to be considered orthodox. Cyril and Nestorius could both assent to the Nicene Creed. Nestorius could also, apparently, assent to the Chalcedonian confession,⁶⁰ which was ultimately a response to the disagreement between the two bishops. Cyril insisted that he did not hold the heretical views of Apollinarius, Arius or any other heretical view which he had been accused of espousing. Nestorius similarly denied any belief in adoptionism or dual sonship. In spite of their confessions of Nicene orthodoxy and rejection of heretical belief, both men, *as they understood the other's position*, considered each other's understanding of the Creed to be, if not heretical, then at the very least dangerously close to heretical. Yet Nestorius was excommunicated and exiled, whereas Cyril maintained most of his dignity and status in the church. Theologians are divided on the issue of Nestorius' orthodoxy—some are reluctant to disagree with the affirmation of three separate ecumenical councils, but since the rediscovery of *The Bazaar of Heraclides*, Nestorius' defence of his position written years after his exile, many theologians are beginning to suggest that Nestorius was misrepresented in the controversy and did not hold the views which he was accused of having. Evidently, it was not enough for a person to simply *claim*

⁶⁰ Braaten, "Modern Interpretations of Nestorius," 252

to hold orthodox belief if one's teaching were interpreted otherwise, whether that interpretation was accurate or not.

One of the results of the controversy was the ruin of an individual's life and career based on unclear theological terminology. Moreover, this terminology all appears to have circled around remarkably similar understandings of Christ's natures. The lessons to be learned from the Nestorian controversy are not only theological but also relational. The 21st century is one of increased ideological and theological polarization, with pastors and theologians building walls between themselves and those with whom they disagree. It is easy to see, too, the rise of the use politics as a tool for advancement of a particular theological position, particularly in the United States. Rather than entering into fruitful dialogue with those with differing theological views, the tendency is to turn to name calling and essentially declaring anathema views different from one's own. The Nestorian controversy is important not only in defining the terminology of Christology, but perhaps also because it provides a lesson in the importance of listening carefully to those with whom we disagree and making an concerted effort to understand what it is they are saying and what they mean by what they say.

The Nestorian controversy left a stain on ecclesiastical history, displaying the recklessness of selfish ambition in the actions of some of the great theologians of the time. Nevertheless, through the debates and councils that were held during and as a result of the controversy, the church was able to add a depth to its understanding of the joining of the divine and human natures in Christ which the brief Nicene Creed had not developed. The bitter nature of the events surrounding the controversy serve as an example for the church of the importance of listening to those with whom one appears to disagree.

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