

§ 7. Doctrine of Christ

Lecture 3

Antiochean Christology (Dyophysitism)

In our study of the incarnation we've been looking at two competing schools of Christological thought among the church fathers: first, the Alexandrian school which held to a one-nature Christology or Monophysitism (one-nature having divine and human elements in Christ), and on the other hand the Antiochean school of Christology which held to a Dyophysite view of Christ (Christ had two natures – one human and one divine).

The Antiochean Dyophysite view of Christology implied that Christ had two complete natures: human and divine. Christ possessed all of the properties which are essential to a complete human nature including both a rational soul and a human body.

One of the most prominent of the Antiochean theologians was Theodore of Mopsuestia who was the author of a treatise on the incarnation called *On the Incarnation*. In this work Theodore thinks of the incarnation as a very special form of indwelling on the part of the *Logos*. By means of this indwelling, the *Logos* (or the second person of the Trinity) attached himself to the man Jesus at the moment of conception in Mary's womb. Because God is omnipresent and provident over everything that happens in history, Theodore says that God is present in his essence to all things both in their existence and in their operation. But by his good pleasure he chooses to be more intimately related to some things than to others. While God is essentially present in the existence and operation of everything, he especially is present in Christ according to his good pleasure. In Christ God was pleased to dwell as in a Son.

Theodore affirmed that there is only one person in Christ. But he also held at the same time that both of his natures – the human nature and the divine nature – are complete and moreover that each nature has its own peculiar *hypostasis* or property bearer or thing that bears that nature (the human nature or the divine nature).

Moreover, he thought of the union of the *Logos* with the man Jesus in terms of a functional unity of love and will. The way in which the *Logos* and the man Jesus were one was a functional unity of mutual love and harmonious will. The person that they constitute seems to be a person just in a sort of functionally unified sense of presenting a common face or (as he put it) *prosopon*. This was the word that was used in the Greek theater for the mask that an actor would wear. It seemed that the *prosopon* or the person that they presented to us was simply a kind of functionally unified face in virtue of their harmonious will and mutual love.

As you can imagine, Theodore's affirmation that there is only one person in Christ was viewed with suspicion by his detractors. If each nature has its own *hypostasis* and is a

person merely in this sort of functional sense then it seems that he doesn't really believe that there is just one person in Christ.¹

But it wasn't Theodore that really came under attack for positing two persons in Christ. Rather, the person most often associated with this view is Nestorius, who was the patriarch of the city of Constantinople in 428. Nestorius affirmed that in Christ there are two complete natures. Nestorius especially objected to Mary's being referred to as *theotokos* which means "the bearer" or "mother" of God. Mary, in Christian piety, was referred to as *theotokos* – "the mother of God" or "the bearer of God" since she bore Christ. Nestorius objected to this sort of language with regard to Mary. He said Mary bore only the man Jesus. She did not bear the divine *Logos*. Mary is not the mother of the *Logos*. She is simply the mother of the man Jesus who was united with the *Logos* in the incarnation. What was formed or conceived in Mary's womb grew up, was crucified, buried, was not God. Rather, it was this man, Jesus. But he is called God because of the divinity of the one who assumed him as his human nature; namely the *Logos*.

So the Alexandrian theologians believed that despite his protestations to the contrary, Nestorius' view really was committed to the position that there are in Christ two persons – two Sons, one human and one divine. I think it is very easy to see why these Alexandrian theologians thought that Nestorius was committed to such a position even though he claimed that he did not believe in two persons or Sons. If each of Christ's natures is complete, each one has its own complete set of rational faculties, then it is difficult to see why you wouldn't have two persons or two Sons in Christ.

The Alexandrian theologians by this time had to admit the existence of a human soul in Christ because Apollinarius had already been condemned for denying that. They couldn't explain the solution to the dilemma of how you could have both a human soul and body and the divine mind without having two persons, but they were certain that the Bible does not teach that there are two Sons. There is only one Son of God; only one person.

Cyril of Alexandria, who was an Alexandrian theologian, wrote the following: "when he was made flesh, we do not define the indwelling in him in precisely the same manner as that in which one speaks of an indwelling in the saints . . ." So the *Logos*' indwelling of Christ is not like the indwelling that you and I experience when the Holy Spirit indwells us. Cyril says, "but being united by nature and not changed into flesh, he effected such an indwelling as the soul of man might be said to have in its own body."² Cyril thinks of the indwelling of the *Logos* in Christ as on the analogy of the way in which your soul indwells your body. I think the problem with this analogy is very apparent. It either supports Apollinarianism which says that Christ didn't have a human soul but the *Logos* was the soul of Christ (the *Logos* took the place of the soul of Christ) and so has the same

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² *Second Letter to Nestorius*

relation to Jesus' body that your soul has to your body, or else if that is not correct then it supports Nestorianism, namely the Son assumes a whole person who has both a soul and a body so that you wind up with two persons.³ Cyril couldn't really explain how you can have two complete natures in Christ without having two persons.

Nestorianism was condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431. The real problem with Nestorianism was that it couldn't really posit a genuine union of God and man in Christ. At best it was a sort of indwelling of God in the man Jesus. That is just a kind of ontological juxtaposition of divinity and humanity and not really a genuine union of divinity and humanity in Christ. But if having a complete human nature involved having a human personality and self-consciousness then it seems very, very difficult, given the rejection of Apollinarianism, to affirm two natures in Christ without lapsing into Nestorianism.

The church had condemned both Apollinarianism and Nestorianism by this time. The difficulty was how in the world do you chart a path forward given these condemnations?

START DISCUSSION

Student: This sounds just like Apollinarianism – is he saying Jesus has a divine soul but not a human?

Dr. Craig: Whom are you talking about?

Student: Nestorius. The one we were just talking about. How is that different again from Apollinarius' view?

Dr. Craig: Apollinarius denied that Christ has a human soul. He said that in Christ the soul was replaced by the *Logos* – the second person of the Trinity. So he had a human body, he had a human animal soul that animated a body, but he didn't have a *nous* or a mind. He didn't have a human mind. The *Logos* was the mind of the incarnate Christ. Nestorius, on the other hand, believed that the *Logos* did not simply assume flesh. He did not simply clothe himself with an inanimate human body. Rather, he had a human mind or soul as well. Think of the man Jesus being conceived in Mary's womb with both a body and a soul that are purely and merely human, and somehow the *Logos* takes that man and makes him his own. He assumes that man in an incarnation through some sort of special indwelling or some sort of union. That would be more the Nestorian view.

Student: I wonder if the problem arises from a definitional standpoint in terms of defining a man as having a body, a soul, and a mind. If you say that is the complete totality of a man then you would naturally run into this problem when you want to have a man and God in one body. I wonder what their definition of a soul is, because it seems that some

of them are trying to insert God in that place of a soul but then you contradict those that would say that you need the soul of a man to have that combination.

Dr. Craig: Yes, I do think that it does tend to hinge on your view of human anthropology – what makes someone a human person. The idea of a soul here is a rational soul or a mind. That is the idea. In Christ there was a human mind, a rational mind, as well as the *Logos*. So the question is: how do you affirm both of those things without having two persons – one the human person (Jesus), and the other the divine person (the *Logos*)? That is the problem.

Student: In the Nestorian view, did they believe in the virgin birth or was that unnecessary?

Dr. Craig: He did believe in the virgin birth. But what he thought was conceived in Mary's womb was the man Jesus. Through the power of the Holy Spirit she miraculously conceived this man, Jesus.⁴ Of course when I say "man" I mean human being. I don't mean he was an adult. But she conceived this human being who grew up to become Jesus of Nazareth. This was a miraculous virgin birth. But you can see on Nestorius' view why he objected to saying Mary is the mother of God because he thought the individual she gave birth to and bore and conceived was this man – this human person – Jesus. She didn't give birth to or conceive the *Logos*. That was why he objected to this language of the mother of God.

Student: The problem goes away if you are a trichotomist because the spirit of the *Logos* is the spirit of Christ. The soul is the man – that is volition, cognition, emotion.

Dr. Craig: Well, it seems to me that what you are saying is just Apollinarianism because Apollinarius was a trichotomist with respect to human nature. Remember he said human nature is composed of a body, a soul, and a mind. You can call one of those elements "spirit" instead. But if that is part of what it is to be a human being then if the *Logos* replaced that part then that is basically Apollinarianism. You are saying there is a part of that human being that was replaced by the *Logos*.

Student: Yes, but it still makes it a three-part human being.

Dr. Craig: That is the question. Does it?

Student: A unique three-part human being, but it is not unlike us when we become believers. Proverbs says our spirit is God's candle.

Dr. Craig: Right. But you and I don't have a divine part in our human makeup. We have a human spirit or mind or soul or something but it is not like we are God incarnate. There is something different.

Student: I would say the spirit is a spiritual essence that is different than what we would call a soul which I would say would be mind, body . . .

Dr. Craig: I understand, but to repeat, whatever you call this third element, if it is not there but is replaced by the *Logos* then you've got Apollinarianism and you've got the objections to it then to consider and show why those objections don't go through.

Student: Under Nestorius' view, would Jesus have had two distinct consciousnesses – human and divine? Some sort of multiple personality?

Dr. Craig: That seems to be the implication, doesn't it? On Nestorianism Christ had two minds. One would be the human mind which began like an infant in Mary's womb and then grew in wisdom, as Luke says, as well as stature. Was a boy and grew up. Was limited in knowledge. Yes. That seems to be right. This is a sort of different mind than the mind of the *Logos* which is omniscient at all times. So the question would be: how can you have that and not have two persons? Because the Nestorians did not want to say there are two persons.

Student: Did Apollinarius ever address the emptying of himself? What does that imply?

Dr. Craig: I don't know. All we have from Apollinarius are fragments of his work which I have read. In these fragments I don't remember that he addressed this question that is raised in Philippians where it says Christ emptied himself and took on a form of a servant. He may well have appealed to that but I do not know. I don't think we have got enough writings from him extant. Most of what we know about him would be from secondary sources attacking that position.

Student: According to Bill Gothard, the human has three parts – spirit, soul, and body. In God's design and God is spirit so that part of us communicates with him.⁵ The soul, comprised of mind, emotion, and will, carries that into our physical activities the body carries out. That is supposed to be the design. But since humans are fallen, the spirit died. So the soul tried to capture the body stimulus and tried to make a person come alive. Instead of the priority of spirit-fed, it is body-fed and kind of pseudo-spirit. It is a matter of priority. Since Christ's Spirit is perfectly linked with God, he has this spirit-fed body where we don't. We have body-fed kind of pseudo-spirit. It is almost just a reverse of the priority in what dominates a person.

Dr. Craig: I don't want to dispute your view of humanity, but I think you are raising the same point that was raised a moment ago. And that is if this spirit (whatever that is) is essential to being a human being then if Christ didn't have it you've got Apollinarianism. If the *Logos* replaced the spirit then there is some essential component of human nature that Christ didn't have. If you say on the other hand this isn't really essential to being a

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human being to have this spirit, what is essential is just the soul and the body, then it seems to me you've got Nestorianism because you've got then a human being who has a mind as well as a body and is fully conscious, and the question would be why isn't this then another person? I hope that you can see the problem here. I am not trying to resolve the problem. I am not trying to dispute your anthropology. But just to help you to see the conundrum that Christians face in trying to understand how Christ could have two complete natures and yet there not be two persons.

Student: Did any of these theologians believe that Christ became human or took on a human form for the first time when Mary actually conceived or did they have any concept of theophanies at this point? A lot of people today believe that the second person of the Trinity – the Son of God – came to Earth and talked, walked, ate in human form several times in the Old Testament. I was curious as to how that worked with any of these.

Dr. Craig: Interesting question. Let me say a couple of things. I would say that these theologians would affirm with orthodoxy Christianity that there is only one God incarnate, and that is Jesus. These prior appearances of God in human form in these theophanies were just that – they were mere appearances. They weren't genuine incarnations. That didn't take place until the conception in Mary's womb. Interestingly enough, Apollinarius did generate some controversy by thinking that somehow the human nature of Christ was already included in divinity. Somehow the *Logos* already was the sort of archetypal man. In that sense humanity was included in the *Logos* already. I'll say something more about that later on because I think that is a promising direction to pursue. That is a good question.

Student: Do we believe – or do you believe – that in these theophanies he probably knew what his body would look like later and took on that same body or is that just something where there is no way we can possibly know.

Dr. Craig: I think that is purely conjectural. I don't think there is any way to know something like that.⁶

Student: I think the nature of this discussion that we are having shows that the early church was committed to trinitarianism. Despite the difficulties, it doesn't seem like anybody was trying to go the unitarian route. Were they challenged by unitarians?

Dr. Craig: No. You are quite right. Remember we surveyed in our discussion on the Trinity the trinitarian controversies of the third and fourth centuries. These were followed by these Christological controversies. For all parties here they assumed the truth of the Nicene Creed which had been promulgated in 325 and said that Christ is fully God.

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Right, this is common ground trinitarian theology that then needed to be sorted out as to how the second person of the Trinity related to his human nature.

END DISCUSSION

Let me conclude our lesson today by quoting from the Council of Chalcedon which was convened in the year 451 by the Emperor at the request of the Pope Leo the Great in order to settle this controversy between Antioch and Alexandria. The statement of the Council of Chalcedon carefully charts a middle course between Antioch and Alexandria. I want to conclude by simply quoting from the Chalcedonian settlement before we next time look at it in detail. This is what the Council declared:

We. . . confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, of a reasonable soul and body; consubstantial [*homoousios*] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial [*homoousios*] with us according to the manhood, like us in all things except sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God [*theotokos*], according to the manhood, one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-Begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures without confusion, without change, without division, without separation, the difference of the natures being by no means taken away because of the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person [*prosopon*] and one Subsistence [*hypostasis*], not divided or separated into two Persons, but one and the same Son and only-begotten God, Word, Lord Jesus Christ. . . .

This statement is a profound theological statement. Next time we meet we will want to examine it in detail to see the safe channel for Christological speculation that the Council sought to establish for the church.⁷

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