

## After Chalcedon - Orthodoxy in the 5th/6th Centuries

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It seems to be received as an historical fact that after the Council of Chalcedon those Christians who refused to accept its decisions and doctrinal statements were immediately isolated and rapidly withdrew into their own communion. This opinion is far from reflecting historical reality, and yet it is often presumed to be true by Oriental Orthodox as much as Chalcedonian Orthodox.

It fails to take full account of the truth that for a Council to be Ecumenical it must be received by the whole Church, and ignores the reality that large numbers of Orthodox Christians rejected it, and continued to oppose it. This opinion assumes that because one group of Orthodox defined the Faith in a particular way any who disagreed with that definition must of necessity have separated themselves from the Faith and therefore from the Church. Yet in the years after Chalcedon, and throughout the 6th century, those who rejected Chalcedon continued to play a significant, and at times dominant, role in the Orthodox Church.

Even before the Council of Chalcedon there had been tensions between those who followed the teaching and terminology of St. Cyril and those who favoured the teaching and terminology of the Antiochean School. The Council of Ephesus in 431 AD had not resolved these tensions even though it had firmly stated the Orthodox position. The Council had left the Church divided and there were large numbers of Orthodox who were out of communion with one another. St. Cyril understood that it was the substance of Christological teaching which was at stake and allowed the use of certain Antiochean terminology, such as speaking of two natures after the union, where it could be unequivocally seen that those using such terminology were fully Orthodox in their understanding of Christ. Thus he was able to restore communion with the Antiocheans under John of Antioch.

Though communion was restored there were still many tensions between these two theological expressions. Yet there was no sense in which either party was viewed as having been a separate Church. Nor was there seen to be a need for any of the episcopal acts of those who had objected to the Council of Ephesus to be repeated, nor were they viewed as invalid. Indeed some Antiocheans continued to be supporters of Nestorius and other heretics such as Theodoret and Diodore even while being in communion with St. Cyril and those who believed according to the Council of Ephesus. These differing attitudes towards Nestorius and his teachings undoubtedly caused problems, and towards the end of his life St. Cyril considered that the Antiocheans had failed to be really converted to Ephesine Orthodoxy. But there was never any sense that once out of communion there could never be the possibility of being back in communion, or that once in error and un-Orthodox there was no prospect of correction and being Orthodox again. When St. Cyril considered that the Antiocheans had substantially accepted an Orthodox Christology then all the other difficulties that remained were passed over to be dealt with later.

Thus at Chalcedon the fact that from the Alexandrian perspective most of the Orthodox world had fallen into error was not something that could not be remedied. And indeed the followers of Chalcedon hoped that those who rejected the Council could be persuaded to accept it. Neither side understood either the acceptance or rejection of the

Council to be irrevocable and the end for all time of any prospect of the other side being Orthodox.

The period of a century and a half following Chalcedon is not the story of a small group of malcontents slipping into obscurity. It is in fact a period during which the Non-Chalcedonians fought hard to restore the whole Church to Cyrilline Orthodoxy, and on several occasions seemed on the verge of doing so. In some respects the situation was similar to the current difficulties in the Anglican Church. There were Non-Chalcedonian congregations trying to cope with Chalcedonian bishops, and bishops faced with opposition from their Patriarchs. It was a period of some confusion but the theological conflict was played out within the Orthodox Church not between two completely separate Churches each claiming to be Orthodox.

There were three main factors complicating the theological debate that took place after Chalcedon. Rome had been lost to the barbarians, there was a growing sense of national identity in the various parts of the Empire, and the great Sees were continually in competition with each other. The Emperors had to balance the desire to regain Rome with the need to try and preserve unity within the Empire of the East. Theological divisions were no help and a uniform Christology was always one of the Emperors underlying ambitions. At times this meant that political policies impinged on theological and ecclesiastical affairs.

Thus Marcian supported Chalcedon and it must have appeared to him that there was the prospect of unity in the Church based on its Christological statement. But if that was indeed his opinion then he was quickly proved wrong. Pope St. Dioscorus may well have withstood his enemies alone, but the people of Alexandria were as staunch defenders of Cyrilline Orthodoxy as any of their bishops, and they were the first to make plain that the See of Alexandria was united in opposition to Chalcedon. When Proterius was appointed Patriarch in place of the exiled Pope Dioscorus he was greeted by a rioting crowd of Alexandrians. Opposition was not limited to Egypt. In Jerusalem the monks rejected Juvenal who had submitted to Chalcedon and appointed Theodosius in his place. The Emperor acted to replace Juvenal with another bishop who accepted Chalcedon but Theodosius had already consecrated several bishops who maintained opposition to Chalcedon.

In 457.AD the Emperor Marcian died. Those who had opposed Chalcedon were able to return to Alexandria and the people elected Timothy Aelurus as their bishop. Proterius was simply ignored, as far as the people of Egypt were concerned, he was merely an Imperial appointee. The Patriarchate of Alexandria was the only Church in Egypt. Those few who supported Proterius were not a different Church, and neither were the followers of Timothy a separate non-Orthodox sect. Thus when Timothy Aelurus was deposed and exiled by the command of the Emperor it was possible for another Timothy, nicknamed Salophaciolus or Trembling Cap, to be the Patriarch of both the Chalcedonian and Non-Chalcedonians in Egypt.

In 474.AD Zeno became Emperor, but he was the subject of a palace coup and Basiliscus became Emperor for just 20 months. During this time Timothy Aelurus was recalled from exile and became once more the head of the Church of Alexandria. He travelled to Constantinople where he was joined by the exiled Patriarch of Antioch, Peter the Fuller. The emperor was persuaded by these Patriarchs to send an encyclical to all the bishops throughout the empire calling upon them to anathematise the Tome of Leo and all the things said and done at Chalcedon which were innovations beyond the Faith of the three

hundred and eighteen holy Fathers. Over 500 bishops subscribed to this letter, including the Patriarchs of Alexandria, Jerusalem and Antioch. The whole ecclesiastical situation seemed to have changed. It was now the Chalcedonians who were on the defensive.

A council was called at Ephesus and a large number of bishops gathered under Patriarchs Timothy and Peter to anathematise Chalcedon, recognise the autonomy of Ephesus and restore the former rights of the see to its bishop. When the council had concluded its business a letter was written to the emperor which said,

"We have anathematised and do anathematise the Tome of Leo and the decrees of Chalcedon, which have been the cause of much blood shedding and confusion, and tumult, and division and strifes in all the world. For we are satisfied with the doctrine and faith of the Apostles and the holy Fathers, the Three Hundred and Eighteen; to which also the illustrious Council of the One Hundred and Fifty in the royal city, and the two other holy Synods at Ephesus adhered, and which they confirmed."

Patriarch Timothy returned to Alexandria and the whole city came out to greet him. The compromise replacement who had held the Patriarchate while Timothy was in exile agreed to retire on a Church pension, and the holy relics of Pope St. Dioscorus were brought from Gangra, his place of exile, to be buried with the other Alexandrian bishops. It seemed for a while that the followers of St. Cyril would see the true faith established throughout the empire once more. A stand was made against those who leant towards the Eutychian heresy and Timothy disciplined several of his bishops. Yet Timothy always took a moderate line with Christians who came over to the Oriental position from having supported Chalcedon, and only insisted that they reject the dyophysite doctrine in writing. Those who had supported Chalcedon were never re-baptised or even anointed, clearly a sign that Timothy, and those with him, saw the followers of Chalcedon as fellow Christians even though they might be in error.

But Zeno returned from his exile and Basiliscus quickly issued another encyclical trying to gain support from the Chalcedonians. Patriarchs Timothy of Alexandria and Anastasius of Jerusalem refused to have anything to do with this new letter, but Zeno, when he had driven Basiliscus into exile, left them in peace since they were both elderly. This is another indication that though both sides opposed each other theologically they were nevertheless able to see a substantial measure of common ground between themselves. If the Chalcedonians had believed Timothy and Anastasius to be heretical in Christological substance then they would surely have not suffered them to retain their positions and influence under any circumstances.

Zeno realised that he could not force Chalcedon upon the empire. He was supported by Acacius, the Chalcedonian Patriarch of Constantinople, who also realised that concessions would need to be made to the opponents of Chalcedon. Acacius drew up the Henoticon as a document that could unite the divided Christians of the East. The text makes no use of the phrase 'two natures' and stresses the pre-eminence of the Nicene faith. It anathematises both Nestorius and Eutyches and all who think contrary to the teachings of Niceae. The Twelve Chapters of St. Cyril are received and while the reality of Christ's Godhead and manhood are upheld, any idea of 'two Sons' is most emphatically rejected. The Cyrilline teaching that 'both the miracles and the sufferings are those of one Person', the Second Person of the Trinity who became Incarnate.

Acacius addressed his letter to 'the bishops, clergy, monks and laity of Alexandria, Egypt, Libya and Pentapolis'. This is again evidence that he believed his theological opponents to be fully part of the Orthodox Church rather than a non-Orthodox sect. It is his fellow Christians he is trying to conciliate and not those who have lost any claim to Christian faith.

The Henoticon was understood to be an Imperial statement of faith which abrogated Chalcedon and the Tome of Leo. It seemed as though things could go back to the situation before Chalcedon had been called. Both Zeno and Acacius had been freed from the need to placate Western opinion by the establishment of a Vandal kingdom centred on Ravenna. The Henoticon caused a schism between the East and West which lasted 35 years but at the time the opinion of the Pope of Rome carried little weight in Constantinople.

Even though Zeno had expelled Basiliscus things were still going well for the opponents of Chalcedon. For the first time the great Sees of Constantinople, Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria were united and Zeno was praised as 'the triumphant star of Christ from the East'. Even the more extreme opponents of Chalcedon accepted that the Henoticon contained a right confession of faith.

Emperor Zeno died in 491 AD and was succeeded by Anastasius, a supporter of the anti-Chalcedonian position. The new emperor was determined to maintain the unity that prevailed in the East, and as a result of his policies 'the Council of Chalcedon was neither openly proclaimed, nor yet repudiated by all'. This is again evidence that the Orthodox Church at that time was able to cope with a certain plurality of opinion within the bounds agreed in the Henoticon. It was not that Christology no longer mattered, but with both the Nestorian and Eutychian positions being explicitly anathematised there was some scope for a variety of opinion about terminology.

In Egypt, however, there remained a large minority who insisted that the Henoticon didn't go far enough, and together with that Orthodox statement it was necessary to anathematise the Council of Chalcedon and the Tome of Leo. Thus the Patriarchs of Alexandria all anathematised the Council, indeed as described previously this was the method used to reconcile those who had been supporters of the Chalcedon. As the opponents of Chalcedon again gained influence in the empire the requirement to anathematise the Council became more insistent. By 512 AD the unity based on the Henoticon was still holding, but in the See of Antioch the Patriarch was now Flavian who was in sympathy with the doctrine of the two natures. He gathered together his bishops and most of them made it clear that they objected to the more rigorous policy being pursued by the opponents of Chalcedon. They supported the Henoticon but were unwilling to wholeheartedly anathematise the Council.

Flavian had left himself exposed and an edict of deposition was issued. The emperor fully supported all these moves and St. Severus, perhaps the greatest of Oriental Orthodox theologians, was brought to Antioch and made Patriarch. When he entered the cathedral and ascended the throne of St Ignatius all the people cried out,

"Set our city free from the Council of Chalcedon! Anathematise now this council which has turned the world upside down! Anathematise now the council of the distorters of faith! Let all the bishops anathematise it now!"

The supremacy of the opponents of Chalcedon was almost complete. At a synod held at Tyre the Henoticon was explained as abrogating the Council and the doctrinal statements which it issued, and which were viewed as additions to the faith, were anathematised. By 516 AD even the supporters of Chalcedon were willing to accept the Council and the Tome, 'not as a definition of faith, nor as a symbol, nor as an interpretation, but only as an anathema against Nestorius and Eutyches.'

Even at this high point of non-Chalcedonian influence and power there was no sense of their being two Churches in the empire. The struggle was for theological truth within the Church not between two different Churches. Both supporters and opponents of Chalcedon could co-exist in a compromise position based on the Henoticon but as the position of the opponents was increasingly established in the empire the requirement to explicitly anathematise Chalcedon meant that in all the great Sees it was the non-Chalcedonians who held the most important positions.

On July 1st, 518 AD, Anastasius died and almost overnight the situation changed. The opponents of Chalcedon now found themselves the opponents of the emperor. The new emperor, Justin, demanded strict uniformity throughout his empire, and he had determined that as far as the Church was concerned that would be a Chalcedonian uniformity. He entered into discussions with Rome about a re-union of East and West and within a year Rome had gained everything it asked for, Acacius was condemned and most of the non-Chalcedonian bishops had been deposed and exiled. Severus fled into Egypt where he spent the rest of his life supporting the non-Chalcedonian faithful and moving from monastery to monastery. Many other resisting bishops also found sanctuary in Egypt and it was at this time and under an increasingly severe persecution that the opponents of Chalcedon and its supporters found themselves becoming distinct Churches, though both still described themselves as Orthodox.

By 525 AD the imperial policy was that all resisting monks should be driven out of their monasteries. All over Arabia and Palestine the monks had to leave their monasteries, were robbed, put in irons and subjected to various tortures. Those faithful who gave them shelter were treated in the same way, and it seemed as if a great wave of persecution swept over all those who opposed Chalcedon. The monasteries of Syria broke off communion with the Chalcedonian bishops and all of them signed an anathema against Chalcedon and the Tome of Leo. In response the Imperial soldiers were sent to expel the monks. It was Winter, just two days before Christmas, and many of the faithful went out into the wilderness with the monks to accompany them some of the way in their journey. The old and sick were forced out and were borne along by the healthy on litters. These persecutions continued for many years until the godly empress Theodora was able to prevail on her husband to allow the monks to return to their monasteries.

In Egypt the Popes found themselves persecuted and imperial appointees imposed on the throne of St Mark. One such was Paul of Tinnis who arrived in Alexandria at the head of a body of soldiers. During his year in Alexandria no-one would communicate with him except the Imperial troops and provincial government. The emperor responded to these actions, which he viewed as a personal insult, by closing the Egyptian churches and setting a guard on them. Yet through this, and worse persecution, the people of Egypt refused to submit to the imperial policy of Chalcedonianism and felt themselves growing further apart from their Byzantine brethren.

Yet despite all of these difficulties there was still the possibility of a real union between the supporters and opponents of Chalcedon. In 530 AD the emperor relaxed his persecution of the resisting Christians and in 532 AD summoned the leaders of the non-Chalcedonians to Constantinople for a conference with the Chalcedonians. Severus did not attend this first meeting, but in 534 AD he made the long journey and was able to meet Anthimus who was made Patriarch of Constantinople and who refused to receive Chalcedon. In this year Theodosius, a friend of Severus, became Patriarch of Alexandria. Thus for a short time there were three opponents of Chalcedon in important positions.

The Emperor Justinian was never really committed to conciliating the non-Chalcedonians. He was more interested in union with Rome and the West. Thus in 536 AD Anthimus was deposed and Severus was condemned as a Nestorian and a Eutychian. The Empress Theodora, ever a supporter of Severus and the non-Chalcedonians helped him to escape back to Egypt where he died a few years later. But it was the last opportunity for any real chance at union. The persecution of non-Chalcedonians started again and the non-Chalcedonian's position increasingly became confused with national resistance to Byzantine oppression.

There were still contacts between the non-Chalcedonians and the Chalcedonians. There were further conferences between 550 and 564 AD, and when the Empress Theodora died a large body of Egyptian monks went up to Constantinople. On each occasion the non-Chalcedonians presented the Cyrilline doctrines about Christ and the reasons for their resistance to Chalcedon, but on each occasion they went home having achieved nothing. At the Second Council of Constantinople the writings of the Nestorians Ibas, Theodore and Theodoret were condemned, and the statements issued by the Chalcedonian bishops gathered there were still broadly in line with those of the Henoticon. The Council tried to express its opposition to the teachings of both Nestorius and Eutyches and spoke in its decrees came close to the non-Chalcedonian position. One such decree states,

"If anyone using the expression, "in two natures," does not confess that our one Lord Jesus Christ has been revealed in the divinity and in the humanity, so as to designate by that expression a difference of the natures of which an ineffable union is unconfusedly made, a union in which neither the nature of the Word was changed into that of the flesh, nor that of the flesh into that of the Word, for each remained that it was by nature, the union being hypostatic; but shall take the expression with regard to the mystery of Christ in a sense so as to divide the parties, or recognising the two natures in the only Lord Jesus, God the Word made man, does not content himself with taking in a theoretical manner the difference of the natures which compose him, which difference is not destroyed by the union between them, for one is composed of the two and the two are in one, but shall make use of the number two to divide the natures or to make of them Persons properly so called: let him be anathema."

There had certainly been a shift over time from the strictly Chalcedonian expressions about Christ, and at this Council it seemed that some non-Chalcedonian concerns had been given due weight. But Chalcedonian attitudes were hardening rather than softening and with the succession of Councils held by the Chalcedonians the non-Chalcedonians found themselves increasingly the subject of anathema and excluded from positions of influence within the empire.

Nevertheless, it can be seen that until the accession of Justin in 532 AD the opponents of Chalcedon had more influence and greater opportunity to further their

theological position than had the supporters of Chalcedon. It was only with the reigns of the Emperors Justin and Justinian that the non-Chalcedonians found themselves facing the full weight of imperial aggression. Until that time the differences between the opponents and supporters of Chalcedon were predominantly theological and the Henoticon showed that the two sides could be reconciled. But such was the force of the persecution under Justin and Justinian that national feelings were aroused against the Byzantine empire and the theological position of non-Chalcedonianism became mixed with the political position of anti-Byzantinianism.

If a date should be placed on the separation of these two bodies of Christians it would be better to place it at 532 AD rather than 451 AD. The non-Chalcedonians had yet to reach the zenith of their influence in 451 AD and in 532 AD they were to suddenly find themselves at their lowest. Yet it is interesting that the two sides were still able to talk to each other, with some measure of equality, even up to 564 AD. This suggests that in the modern discussions between the Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians there is the possibility of dialogue as equals even while recognising the distinctives in each position. And it also suggests that Orthodoxy can accommodate such differences as exist between Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians as long as the heresies of Nestorius and Eutyches are explicitly condemned. An attitude of outright hostility between the two families of Orthodox is not a necessity, and nor is there a requirement for either side to give up all distinctives in an imposed uniformity.

The history of theological tension after Chalcedon provides some hope for modern times. The ecclesiastical position of extreme Chalcedonians is not 'traditional', rather it represents a fear of any difference and a concentration on secondary issues while agreement in substantial matters is ignored. The conciliatory efforts of moderate Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians better represents the 'traditional' attitudes of the fathers of these years, and indeed of St Cyril himself. Following in their footsteps with humility and compassion there is once more the possibility of a real theological unity that respects difference and is able to cope with it.