

## LESSON TWENTY- TWO – The Eastern and Western Churches in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Centuries

### Introduction

- The late 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries saw important developments in theology, liturgy and spirituality of the Eastern church.
- The 6<sup>th</sup> century was also the age of the man who became the model Byzantine emperor, Justinian.
- By the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century the distinctive characteristics of the Eastern and Western churches had shaped two different ecclesiastical traditions and in the East various subsets emerged.

### Theological Developments in the East before Justinian

- The councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon produced a three-way split in Eastern churches that continues to the present.
- 1. The Chalcedonians or Byzantine Orthodox**
- 2. Those usually called Monophysites or Oriental Orthodox (claiming the heritage of Cyril of Alexandria) and**
- 3. The Church of the East (unfairly called “Nestorian”)<sup>1</sup>**
- There was much dissatisfaction in the East with the Western-inspired formula at Chalcedon (451), which sounded Nestorian to the followers of Cyril. The objections to Chalcedon were both doctrinal and jurisdictional.
- The Cyrilline opponents of Chalcedon, which said that Jesus Christ was “one person in two natures,” wanted to say that He was “out of two natures” before the union, but after the union was one nature.
- This latter formula left the humanity of Christ rather abstract and impersonal, but it emphasized the unity of his being and the predominance of the divine in the resultant person.
- Because the presence of humanity was not denied, the name “Monophysites” commonly given to them is not wholly accurate and not acceptable to modern heirs of the position. The Greek *monos* in the word Monophysites implies “only one” nature. A better term would be Henophysite, for the Greek word *hen* says “one” without the implication of only.
- Just as the Antiochians did not regard themselves as Nestorian and rejected the position of “two persons” with which Nestorius was charged, so the later followers of Cyril of Alexandria did not regard themselves as Eutychian and rejected the view that the human nature was wholly lost in the divine, the view to which the term Monophysitism would apply.
- There were also national feelings against the Council of Chalcedon. Egypt was virtually in revolt after the council, for it was loyal to its deposed patriarch, Dioscorus. Both Alexandria and Antioch were displeased with the prestige given to Constantinople in canon 28.

- Rival bishops competed for possession of the sees of Alexandria and Antioch, but popular sentiment favored the Monophysite claimants.
- One of these, Peter the Fuller, off and on the bishop of Antioch, added to the Trisagion (Holy, Holy, Holy) the phrase, “who was crucified for us.”
- This addition became a focal point of controversy, but not only as something new in an important part of liturgy.
- Liturgical changes like this, joined with doctrinal differences, were often occasions of controversy.
- Imperial policy for two centuries had to come to terms with Henophysite sentiment in the eastern provinces.
- They attempted to make modifications within the framework of Chalcedon, which they were not willing to repudiate since it had established canon law of the church and recognized the special position of Constantinople in the church.
- The contest for the imperial office between Zeno and Basiliscus produced the first imperial efforts to settle theology apart from a council.
- Basiliscus in 476 issued the *Encyclion*, prepared by the Henophysites Timothy the Cat of Alexandria and Peter the Fuller of Antioch. It accepted the first three ecumenical councils but condemned the *Tome* of Pope Leo and “all things done at Chalcedon” that were contrary to Nicaea.
- Zeno regained power and in 482 modified the repudiation of Chalcedon with the *Henoticon*, an edit of reunion. It condemned both Nestorius and Eutyches, exalted the *Twelve Anathemas* sent by Cyril to Nestorius and made no mention of Leo’s *Tome*.
- The patriarch of Constantinople at the time was Acacius who supported the effort to achieve unity. However, Pope Felix III in 484 excommunicated him on the grounds of his interfering in other Eastern churches, something he felt was an exercise of his rights under canon 28 of Chalcedon.
- For Rome the rights of bishops were more at stake than was orthodoxy. The Acacian Schism between Rome and Constantinople was brought to an end by Emperor Justin in 519.
- Moderates did accept the *Henoticon* and it is now a doctrinal standard of the Jacobite church.
- In 512 Severus became bishop of Antioch, and he gave a definitely anti-Chalcedonian interpretation to the *Henoticon*. The Mono/Henophysitism which has lasted to modern times in Syria is Severan in theology.
- Severus continued, as Cyril, to use nature and person as synonymous. For him there is a logical, not a real, distinction between the two natures in Jesus Christ.
- Following Severus’s death in 538, there was a dual succession to the patriarchate of Antioch, one Melchite or Orthodox and the other Henophysite.
- The church in Armenia adopted the Henophysite position in 491. The synod of Dvin in 506 included bishops from Armenia, Georgia and the Caucasus who rejected the creed of Chalcedon.
- The church of Georgia thereafter elected its own catholicos/patriarch. Around 600 it returned to Byzantine orthodoxy, however and was excommunicated by the Armenian church.

- Henophysite Christology spread from Syria or Persia in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. In Egypt the Henophysites had no strong leader. Their common slogan was “one in the enfleshed nature of the God-Word.”
- The Coptic church supplied the Ethiopian church with its patriarch and the church in Ethiopia followed Egypt into Henophysitism.
- The Church of the East in Persia maintained the Antiochene Dyophysite (two-nature) Christology. Although officially accepting the creed of Nicaea since a synod in 410, the church adopted an explicitly “Nestorian” credal statement at a synod in 486 and then in 497 rejected the *Henoticon*.
- Another synod in 585 approved the writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia as the church’s theological standard while anathemizing the “heresy of Eutyches.”
- The Church of the East never taught, however, the heretical Dyophysitism of two Sons or two persons. As usual in the Antiochene tradition, the emphasis was on an impassible deity.
- The irony of the situation is that modern scholars conclude that the Chalcedonians, the Henophysites and the Church of the East were essentially saying the same thing about Jesus Christ – somehow He was at the same time two (divine and human) yet one individual. Their different starting points gave formulations that opponents found unacceptable.
- In the period around 500 flourished one of the influential persons in Greek Orthodox spirituality, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. The real name of the person is unknown. He ascribed his combination of Christianity and Neoplatonism to a convert of Paul in Athens (Acts 17:34) and his contemporaries accepted his writings as genuine.
- Pseudo-Dionysius, later claimed by both Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians, was imprecise in his Christology, speaking of Jesus Christ as a composite being with a single theandric (divine-human) energy. Learned in Neoplatonism, he was also a mystic.
- Mysticism in its narrow, technical sense, refers to an experience of union with deity, but in current study is often broadened, as a species of spirituality, to refer to an experience of the presence of God. Pseudo-Dionysius fits the narrower definition and he became the fountainhead of a strain of mysticism widely influential in Greek Christianity and, after being translated into Latin in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, influential in the West as well.
- Through confusion with the first bishop of Paris and martyr, Dionysius, Pseudo-Dionysius became the patron saint of France. His writings had some claim to the authority of Paul as containing the sort of teaching he supposedly communicated to philosophical Athenians.
- Pseudo-Dionysius’s writings, *On Celestial Hierarchy*, *On Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, *On Divine Names and Mystical Theology*, stressed the tendency already found in Greek Christian authors like Origen, Athanasius and Gregory of Nyssa to define the goal of human salvation as divinization.
- This deification is attained by purification, illumination and perfection (union with God), which became the standard three stages of mysticism.

## The Age of Justinian

- Justinian sought to regain the lost lands of the empire. In this goal he was aided by the able General Belisarius.
- In 534 the Byzantines put an end to the Vandal Kingdom in North Africa.
- The Gothic War, reestablished rule in Italy. In 554 a foothold was gained in Spain.
- These conquests drained the economic resources of the empire. The Lombards invaded Italy in 556 and weakened the Byzantine position. They gained control of the peninsula except for a strip of land from Ravenna to Rome.
- Under Justinian there was undertaken a compilation of civil law, the *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, which was to be the basis of legal codes in Europe for centuries.
- It contains four parts: the *Institutes*, a manual explaining the principles of law for students; the *Digests*, jurisdictional decisions classified and harmonized; the *Code* proper, over 4,000 laws from Hadrian to Justinian, based on the earlier compilation of Theodosius II and the *Novellae* new laws of Justinian and later two of his successors.
- From the 11<sup>th</sup> century Justinian's compilation of law slowly established itself in the western European countries except for England, where the old common law prevailed.
- Often seen as the restorer of imperial power, Justinian saw himself as in many ways an innovator making improvements in law and government.
- Later historians assess his policies of military expansion as so exhausting financial resources as to be more or less disastrous for the empire. An outbreak of the Bubonic Plague in the last decades of Justinian's rule further weakened his empire.
- Justinian took an active interest in church affairs. He was a good canon lawyer and theologian, so he entered church conflicts not as an outsider invading a foreign domain, but as an insider trying to fulfill better the duties incumbent upon him.
- In the legislation of Justinian, the word "patriarchate" and the idea expressed by it of the church ruled by five patriarchs was made official.
- Thus, was completed the constitutional work of Chalcedon, recognizing five chief churches in Christendom – Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem.
- Justinian's wife Theodora was of Henophysite sympathies, unlike Justinian himself, who nonetheless sought a compromise that would keep the Henophysites in the orthodox church and loyal to the empire.
- A series of controversies filled Justinian's reign and he was personally involved in many of them.
- The Theopaschite controversy involved the expansion in the liturgy to include the formula "One of the Trinity suffered for us in the flesh." The statement could be orthodox, but it was suspect to the Chalcedonians, for it sounded Monophysite and it was new. Justinian secured acceptance of the Theopaschite formula in Rome and Constantinople in 534.
- Both Dyophysites and Henophysites were afraid that Chalcedon could not be interpreted without Nestorian implications. The Neochalcedonians – Justinian himself, John of Scythopolis, Leontius of Byzantium and later Leontius of Jerusalem, gave a way of interpreting Chalcedon consistent with the Christology of Cyril of Alexandria.

- Since Chalcedon had spoken of two natures in one *hypostasis* (person or individual), the philosophical question was how there could be a hypostatic union of the natures?
- Using Aristotelian distinctions, the Neochalcedonians said that in Jesus Christ one nature found its attributes in the other nature.
- The human nature subsists in the Logos. Between the state of existing in one's own self and being non-existent or lacking self-existence, there is a middle state of subsisting, that is, having existence or individuality, in another *hypostasis*.
- Jesus Christ's humanity is not without hypostasis, since it exists, nor is it a hypostasis, since it does not exist by itself.
- But a nature without a hypostasis would be an abstraction, so Christ's humanity exists in the Word, to whom it belongs and who gives it power to exist by taking it into himself.
- The Origenist controversy began among the monks, some of whom were the bitterest foes of Origen's spiritualizing theology. There had been an anti-Origen reaction at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, especially against the use to which Evagrius of Pontus put the theology of Origen.
- During Justinian's reign there was a fresh growth of Evagrian Origenism. It was opposed by Saba, monastic superior in Palestine whose followers continued to persecute Origenist monks.
- In 543 or 544 Justinian condemned nine points from Origen's works that has resulted in the loss of many of his writings in their Greek originals. In 553, in advance of the official opening of the 5<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Council, Justinian secured 15 anathemas against Evagrius from the bishops already assembled.
- The special concern of the 5<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Council, also known as The Second Council of Constantinople, was the "Three Chapters." There was considerable opposition to three Antiochian theologians: Theodore of Mopsuestia, Ibas of Edessa, and Theodoret of Cyrus, who because of their greater stress on the humanity of Jesus Christ were suspect of Nestorianism.
- In 544 Justinian issued an edict, the "Three Chapters," against their writings. He was careful not to impair formally the Definition of Faith at Chalcedon, but the condemnation of the writings of these Antiochenes was designed to remove any possibility of giving it a Nestorian interpretation.
- The Cyrillic interpretation of Chalcedon was now the only official one.
- The Eastern churches, even the Orthodox, have continued to give more emphasis to the divinity than to the humanity of Jesus Christ.
- A concurrent controversy to the Second Council of Constantinople was connected with Pope Vigilius. Vigilius was an ambitious deacon appointed papal representative at Constantinople.
- He was advanced by Theodora, who thought he would be favorable to her. After Rome was retaken by the Byzantines in 536, Pope Silverius was deposed in 537 and Vigilius was consecrated as his successor.
- The new pope, however, did not favor the Henophysites and refused to join in the condemnation of the three Antiochian theologians.
- He was brought to Constantinople and, after considerable waverings, agreed in 548 to their condemnation, but with express reservations in favor of Chalcedon.

- This condemnation provoked strong opposition in the West, and a council at Carthage even excommunicated him.
- Vigilius retracted his condemnation of the Antiochenes. Before reaching Rome, he died in 555.
- Ultimately Justinian's policy of winning back those he called Monophysites failed. They continued strong in the eastern provinces, now with an increasing national consciousness.
- Justinian's concessions were not enough, for the Henophysites demanded express condemnation of Chalcedon.
- Justinian resorted to repressive measures, which dealt them severe blows.
- In the decade after 540 a real separated church emerged. This was due in Syria largely to the unflagging work of Jacob Baradaeus, who was consecrated metropolitan of Edessa in 542, but spent most of his life traveling on foot throughout the Near East, appointing clergy of Henophysite sympathies, strengthening his fellow believers and defending their doctrine.
- From Jacob derives the name Jacobite for the Henophysites in Syria, whose name for themselves is the Syrian Orthodox Church. Monasticism was important in the Syrian church, and the monastery of Mar Barsauma became an important Jacobite center until its destruction in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. In Egypt the Coptic church was also Henophysite.
- Justinian closed the Academy in Athens in 529, a date symbolically significant for the transition from the ancient to the medieval world, for it was the same year as the Council of Vaison in Gaul that instructed all priests to give a Christian education to children admitted to the rank of readers (symbolic of the transfer of education to the church in the West), the Council of Orange that established Semiaugustinianism as the faith of the West and the founding of the monastery of Monte Cassino in Italy by Benedict.
- Justinian took measures against pagans and heretics. The canonical decisions of the church were enshrined in civil law.
- In theological controversies the argument from authority assumed an ever more important place. Whereas the 4<sup>th</sup> century theologians argued from Scripture, after 381 arguments increasingly appealed to the earlier Fathers as well as to Scripture.
- At the council of Ephesus in 431 the reading aloud of written documents with the bishops giving their judgement replaced proceedings primarily of oral debate. Accordingly, the Byzantine theologians increasingly argued using quotations from the Church Fathers who preceded them.
- In response to Justinian's command that tribes on the periphery of the empire be converted to Christianity, much of Nubia (now southern Egypt and northern Sudan) accepted Christianity.
- The reign of Justinian saw the flowering of the first great period of Byzantine art, and some of its masterpieces are still to be seen, especially in Ravenna, Italy.
- The high point of artistic achievement under Justinian was the doomed basilica of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, designed by Anthemius of Tralles and Isidore of Miletus, one of the greatest architectural accomplishments of all time. On viewing the completed building, Justinian is reported to have exclaimed, "Solomon, I have surpassed you!"

- In Eastern Orthodoxy, the basic manifestation of the church is the eucharistic assembly. The orthodox liturgy came to exhibit increased pomp, display and splendor. It emphasized the sense of holy awe before the divine mysteries.
  - Popular devotion developed along lines already traced: veneration of martyrs and now saints, trust in their intercessions and miraculous powers, attachment to their relics, and fondness for pilgrimages.
  - The veneration of Mary also assumed a preeminent place. The title, Theotokos (God bearer or Mother of God), which had been approved in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, was at first a Christological and not Mariological statement, but it further the exaltation of Mary.
  - Mary was invoked in prayer among Greek speakers in the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century, but the first Latin hymn involving an address to Mary is from the 5<sup>th</sup> century. In the East, churches were named for Mary, Marian feasts were introduced into the liturgical calendar and pictures of Mary were produced.
  - Rome added the name of Mary with the title “Mother of God” to the Mass in the 6<sup>th</sup> century and in the 7<sup>th</sup> century added the Eastern feasts of the Annunciation, Visitation, Birth and Purification.
  - In the East there did not exist to the same extent the gulf that emerged in the West between clergy and laity.
  - For both the East and the West during the Medieval and Byzantine periods, church and state may be viewed as two sides of the same coin.
  - The Eastern emperor certainly exercised much influence in the affairs of the church. But orthodox thinkers have rejected the term “Caesaropapism” (the emperor functioning as the equivalent of a pope) to describe the involvement of the emperor in the affairs of the church.
  - The great liturgies arose in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries and most were codified in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries. They represent much more elaboration than was found in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century liturgies. Several factors favored the creation and utilization of written liturgies.
- 1. There are natural tendencies to uniformity in the language of worship. Things well said, or impressive ways of doing things, tend to be repeated.**
  - 2. Unlearned bishops and presbyters needed guidance in the conduct of worship.**
  - 3. A stable written liturgy made the services more orderly.**
  - 4. The desire to hold to what was ancient and believed to be apostolic became even more deeply ingrained and this tendency worked against any desire for change.**
  - 5. The concern for orthodoxy and fear of heretical doctrines further sanctified what was old and blocked major innovations. What liturgical changes were made sparked controversies.**
  - 6. The Jewish synagogue liturgy received classical formulations at a comparable period. Whether there were any mutual influences or only parallel developments in the two religions at a comparable stage of their developments, is not now clear.<sup>2</sup>**

The main families of liturgies show certain broad similarities in structure, themes and occasionally even in wording but had distinctive features.

The principal Eastern families of liturgies and their main representatives are the following:

1. **Alexandrian and Egyptian**
  - a. Early attestations are in the prayers of Serapion and the Der Balizeh papyrus. The first complete text is the *Liturgy of Mark*. The Coptic Liturgy of St. Cyril is in use today.
2. **Jerusalem**
  - a. Its practice is represented by the *Liturgy of James*. Along with the next two families, it may be grouped together under the heading West Syrian.
3. **Clementine**
  - a. This is a pseudonymous name for the liturgy found in book 8 of the *Apostolic Constitutions* from the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. It may derive from Antioch, which provided the basis for the next liturgy.
4. **Constantinopolitan**
  - a. Two liturgies are associated with the eastern capital and are known by the names of two of the great Eastern Fathers. The *Liturgy of Basil* is older and in its eucharistic prayers may go back to Basil and his church in Caesarea of Cappadocia. The *Liturgy of Chrysostom* was in use before 431, but was linked with Chrysostom only from the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The latter is the liturgy in common use in the Greek church, with the former used on certain special days.
5. **East Syrian**
  - a. This family includes the “Nestorian,” Syro-Malabar and Addai and Mari liturgies.<sup>3</sup>

The principal families of Western liturgies are the following:

1. **Roman**
  - a. Important manuscripts witnesses are later and include the following *Sacramentaries: Leonine* or *Verona, Gelasian* and *Gregorian*.
2. **Gallican**
  - a. This is best typified in the *Missale Gothicum*. The *Bobbio Missal* is mixed Gallican and Roman liturgy. The next three may be considered subspecies of the Gallican.
3. **Ambrosian**
  - a. This was the liturgy of Milan, which survives in use there; whatever part Ambrose had in formulating it we do not know.
4. **Mozarabic**
  - a. Developed in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, this was in use in Iberia until the 11<sup>th</sup> century and survives at Toledo.
5. **Celtic**
  - a. The *Stowe Missal* from the 8<sup>th</sup> century preserves a Hiberno-Gallican liturgy.<sup>4</sup>



- The term “Mass” was in use in the 4<sup>th</sup> century for a liturgical rite and by the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century was applied to the eucharistic service. The formula of dismissal, *Ite missa est* (Go, this is the dismissal) apparently gave the name of “Mass” to the whole service.
- The development of the church in the first 6 centuries had been outlined in the following manner:

**An “early catholic church” (the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and some push this back into the later documents of the New Testament); an “old catholic church” (late 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century); a “state catholic church” (4<sup>th</sup> century); a “Roman catholic church” (5<sup>th</sup> century in the West), and a “Byzantine orthodox church” (6<sup>th</sup> century in the East).<sup>5</sup>**

- The Germanic invasions brought political instability in the West, but stable government continued in the eastern half of the empire.
- After the division of the empire in 395 between the sons of Theodosius I, the unity of East and West was never reestablished.
- Plus the subsequent Arab conquest of the eastern provinces and control of the sea routes, added to the Germanic conquest of the West, caused the separate development of Eastern and Western Christianity, and accentuated the differences that already existed between the Greek and Latin mentalities of these two major branches of Christianity.
- It is characteristic that we call the Eastern church “orthodox” and the Western church “catholic.”
- In the East the controversies were over God and Christ; in the West over the nature of the church and of human beings. The East was more concerned with the great philosophical issues raised by the faith; the West was more legal and practical in their concerns.
- Accordingly, the 4<sup>th</sup> century in the East was dominated theologically by the Arian controversy over the Godhead; in the West, in North Africa, the major ecclesiastical problem was Donatism, concerned with the nature of the church and the sacraments.
- In the 5<sup>th</sup> century, similarly, the East was conflicted over the theological issue of the nature of Jesus Christ, whereas the West was torn by a controversy over the anthropological issues raised by the conflict between Pelagius and Augustine.
- All the major controversies may be seen as concerned with salvation: Arianism with how God saves and Donatism with how the church fits into salvation; the Christological debates with the divine role and Pelagianism with the human role in salvation.
- Other developments mentioned in this lesson reflect other differences. In regard to the eucharistic liturgy the East emphasized the divine presence, the West the act of sacrifice.
- Hence, the East put more emphasis on the invocation of the presence of the Holy Spirit; the West on the words of institution, reliving the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.
- In regard to church organization, the patriarch of Constantinople operated in the shadow of the emperor; the bishop of Rome face no such competing political power.
- Differences between the Western church and the Byzantine church may be summed up by saying that the Eastern church did not have a Middle Ages. Much more continuity was maintained by the Orthodox churches than by their Western counterpart.
- The major factor here was the Germanic invasions and the subsequent conversion of the Germanic peoples.

- The Eastern churches had somewhat comparable experiences in the conversion of the Slavs and the Muslim invasions, but the results were different.
- Furthermore, the Muslim invasions were much more devastating to the churches that came under the Muslim control than the Germanic invasions were in the West, because the Muslim conquerors were not converted to Christianity.

---

<sup>1</sup> Church History, Volume One, Ferguson, Everett, page 306

<sup>2</sup> Church History, Volume One, Ferguson Everett, page 322

<sup>3</sup> Church History, Volume One, Ferguson Everett, page 323

<sup>4</sup> Church History, Volume One, Ferguson, Everett page 323-325

<sup>5</sup> Church History, Volume One, Ferguson, Everett, page 325