**When Christianity Fought Itself**

**A church synopsis from Ephesus I until the Muslim Conquests (431-633 A.D.)**

The two major church events during this period were the Council of Ephesus at the beginning, and the Council of Chalcedon (pronounced KAL-ke-don) soon after. But they had 27 other councils too. This period included the fall of Rome, the mass invasion of the former Roman Empire, and started of the Middle Ages. These were tumultuous times,

# The Council of Ephesus I Jun-Sept. 431 A.D.

Nestorius was a powerful and popular preacher. He had the enviable position as the patriarch of Constantinople, one of the four highest positions in the Church. But he would not say Mary was the mother of “God”, only of “Christ”. Of course, the Bible never calls Mary the mother of God, and despite the unfortunate phrase, everyone agreed that Mary was not the mother of the Father and the Holy Spirit. But Nestorius had a second reason to not agree: he believed Christ had two distinct wills, human and a divine. Later Nestorians would go farther, almost as though Christ was two individuals inside one body. So Nestorius was excommunicated at the Council of Ephesus, in 431 A.D. Nestorians evangelized east to Persia, in China, India, and in between.

Nestorians, also had a second error, in that they followed Pelagian teachers, who taught that people were not born with a sinful nature.

But according to the Council of Ephesus, are you a heretic? “Whoever does not anathematize Nestorius let him be anathema.” (session 1 p.199)

# The Council of Chalcedon 451 A.D.

The strongest group against Nestorius were Copts from Egypt, and 20 years later they got kicked out of the church too, as “Monophysites”. They believe that Jesus not only had one will, but only one nature, a fusion of human and divine. It was like putting a teaspoon of tea in the ocean. This tends to make Jesus’ suffering and temptations unreal, as His nature was 99%+ God on less than 1% human. They were excommunicated in 451 A.D., they mainly stayed in Egypt and Syria.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Year AD** | **Timeline of Ephesus until Muslim Conquests (431-633 A.D.)** |
| Jun-Sep 431 | Council of Ephesus I: 200 bishops, against Pelagius & all who were not against Nestorius |
| > 431 | *The Didascalia*. 70 pages of Christian sayings |
| 442- | Syriac Peshitta Mt -1 Peter |
| 448 | Persian Yazdegerd II persecutes Christians |
| c.450 | Alexandrinus manuscript. Most of OT & NT |
| 5th cent. | 32 Bible papyrii & manuscripts |
| 433-450 | Peter Chrysologus of Ravenna, Italy 179 pages |
| 441-452 | 5 church councils. Orange I, Ephesus II, etc. |
| 451 | 4th: Council of Chalcedon vs. Monophysites |
| > 451 | Monophysites put Bible into Geez Ethiopian |
| 451/452 | Nestorius wrote *Bazaar of Heracleides* |
| c.454 | Julian of Eclanum, Italy (Pelagian) |
| c.455 | Bezae Cantabrigiensis (D) Gospels & Acts |
| 455,476 | Vandals sack Rome. Then emperor deposed. |
| 457 | Monophysites & Nestorians in Syria split |
| 420-461 | Patrick, an English missionary to the Irish |
| 420-460 | Christians killed and churches burned after they burned down a Zoroastrian temple |
| 440-461 | Pope Leo I or Rome turned back Attila |
| c.472 | Sharahb’il persecutes Ethiopian Christians |
| 484 | Nestorian Council of Jundish honors Pelagian Theodore of Mopsuestia. Monks cannot marry. |
| c.484 | Arian Visigoths persecute Algerian Christians |
| 489 | Orth. shut down Nestorian school in Edessa |
| 497- | Nestorian missions into central Asia |
| 474-511 | 5 historians. Moses of Chorene, etc. |
| by 500 | an estimated 38 million Christians 20% world |
| 475-529 | 8 church councils. Arles VII, 4th Persian, etc. |
| 450-550 | 14 papyrii & manuscripts |
| 517 | Copts kill 350 Maronite monks |
| 499-523 | Arian Visigoths persecute N. Afr. Christians |
| 523-524 | Jewish Yemeni king kills 20K Christians since Byzantines persecuted Jews |
| 499-533 | Remigius, Vedast, & Clovis’ wife convert Franks |
| 484-518 | Rom. Pope excommunicates east. churches |
| 507-533 | Fulgentius of Ruspe wrote 185 pages |
| 503-543 | Rules of St. Benedict [of Nursia] for monks |
| 531-537 | Schism among Nestorians |
| 527-549 | Phantasiastes said Christ’s body incorruptible |
| 500-600 | 46 papyrii & manuscripts |
| 553 | Council of Constantinople II (c.153 bishops) condemns Nestorius, Pelagius, & Origen |
| 540-545 | Khosro I persecutes Nestorians & sacks Antioch after his Christian son tried to usurp |
| 527-572 | Byzantines persecute Egyptian Copts |
| 554-582 | Jews in France must convert or leave |
| by 600 | An estimated 40 million Christians. 18% world |
| ca.600 | Term “Sacrifice of the Mass” first used |
| 590-604 | Pope Gregory I wrote 338 pages |
| 590-615 | Irish missionaries to Scotland |
| 614-615 | Persians sack Jerusalem, kill Christians |
| 405-625 | 5 spurious works. Gospel of Nicodemus, etc. |
| 628 | Constantinople, France Jews must convert |
| 633 | Fourth Council of Toledo, Spain |
| 431-633 | 124 writers, >3,000 pages, 13 histories, 29 councils |

# The in-fighting church

Outside the Roman Empire, the church suffered persecution. But inside the Roman Empire, they continued to persecute others. And after Christians struggling with Arians, who would use fair means or foul, Christians fought against fellow Christians.

There are some things I wish we could ignore. Why did they have to persecute Jews? Why did they foolishly burn down a Zoroastrian temple? Why did Orthodox and Copts feel the need to kill each other, and Nestorians? I don’t know. When I study the early Christians, I feel like I am studying about brothers and sisters, and friends. But starting with this period, I feel like I am studying about strangers, with alien ways.

# Similarities with them and us

The teachings about God and Christ in the four ecumenical councils, Nicea I, Constantinople I, Ephesus, and Chalcedon, are believed in Roman Catholic, eastern Orthodox, Protestant and non-denominational churches today. Nestorians officially affirmed the Council of Chalcedon that expelled the Monophysites. Monophysites would agree with the Council of Ephesus that excommunicated Nestorians.

# How they differ from churches today

Their emphasis was wrong. Many writings of this period are singularly focused, not with sharing the gospel to all nations, not with loving others and being salt and light, but appealing to prior councils and writers, and providing debate points for the fighting between the Orthodox, Nestorians, and Monophysites.

# Where they went wrong

A writer they all admired serves as a witness against them. Paradoxically, Athanasius of Alexandria was considered a good Nestorian by Nestorians, a good Monophysite by Monophysites, a good Orthodox by the Orthodox, and generally a good Christian teacher by everyone (except Arians). How can this be?

Early Christians taught at least 1,042 teachings that Christians accept today; Athanasius taught on over 605 of them. Athanasius went into far more detail than anyone before Him about the Trinity and the nature of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But in all the details in 412 pages of his teaching, he never thought it important to go into the extra-biblical details on how Jesus was fully God and man and the will of Christ.

It was commendable that Nestorians spread the gospel far and wide throughout India, China, Mongolia, Persia, and everywhere in between, except they had a bad foundation with two serious errors. Nestorius himself was not as extreme as later Nestorians; perhaps he could have been convinced to correct his wrong views. Yet his errors were not as serious as Origen’s, an earlier teacher. But if instead of being so zealous to kick out Nestorius they would have been more eager to engage with him and correct him, then perhaps the strange teachings might have eventually died out, instead of growing stranger for 1,000 years.

The Monophysite Copts of Egypt suffered violent persecution by the Orthodox at the time of the Muslim conquest. Is it no wonder that Egypt did not give much resistance to the Muslim army, trading violent persecution for just heavier taxation?

Finally, do you think there is anything wrong with a group of bishops saying “something is a heresy just because we say so.” There are heresies out there, whose doctrines send people to Hell, and the Bible tells us to guard against them. But how do we tell what is a heresy, and what is not? We have to go back to the apostles and their companions, and the words God wrote through them, the New Testament. When they deny these teachings they might be a heretic (or else just a regular unbeliever). But just denying my theological view does not make anyone a heretic, even if my theological view is correct and theirs is wrong.

**Verses to remember them by**

“Now I beg you, brothers, look out for those who are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and turn away from them. For those who are such don’t serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the innocent.” Romans 16:17-18 (World English Bible)

“Avoid a factious man after a first and second warning, knowing that such a one is perverted and sinful, being self-condemned.” Titus 3:10-11 (WEB)