



SESSION 15: THE CHURCH IN THE 5TH CENTURY- CONTENT

1. In this session we examine significant events for the Church that occurred in the 5th century (410-484). In 410 the Germanic Goths, led by King Alaric, invaded the Western Empire and sacked Rome. In 455 Vandals coming through France and Spain and across Gibraltar into North Africa sacked Rome. This is important to our perspective, as it must have affected the Western Empire's priorities relating to the Church in the East.
2. Pope Innocent I of Rome (402-417) referred to his position as "head and apex of the episcopate".
3. It is also important to realize that Christianity in the patriarchates of Antioch (Syria) and Alexandria (North Africa) had developed different emphases within the Faith, ultimately leading to a rivalry between these two centers of Christianity. In Antioch Diodorus of Tarsus had transmitted his emphasis to his disciple Theodore of Mopsuestia. (Remember that Diodorus was the leader of a monastic group that Saint John Chrysostom had joined for a time.) This emphasis was on the coordination of the human and divine will of Christ. It was an emphasis on Christ's achievement – a belief that He grew like all men in body and soul, in knowledge and righteousness, and that as that occurred He received gifts of the Spirit, struggled, and overcame His passions. In Alexandria the Patriarch Cyril continued the traditions of Athanasios, Ignatius and Irenaeus, emphasizing the experience of the Church's salvation by Christ. For Cyril and his followers the whole essence of salvation was in the unity of God and man in Christ. These two emphases were not exclusive, but they were different in importance. We might consider that the Antiochian emphasis was upon the development of divinity in Christ while the Alexandrian emphasis was upon salvation and thus upon the divinity of Christ from his earthly beginning.
4. In 420 the Antiochian Nestorius, who had been a disciple of Theodore of Mopsuestia, was invited by Emperor Theodosius II to become the Bishop of Constantinople. Much like Saint John Chrysostom, Nestorius struggled against heretics and pagans and instituted moral reform among the clergy, making enemies including Theodosius' sister Pulcheria. Nestorius said that: 1) there was a difference between the divine and human natures of Jesus, 2) the Logos indwelt the person of Jesus, making Christ a God-bearing man rather than a God-man, 3) Christ is not identical with the Son, but personally united to the Son. Because of this, Nestorius said that the Virgin Mary was not the 'Theotokos' (i.e. God-bearer), but the 'Christotokos' (i.e. Christ-bearer).
5. In Alexandria Cyril believed that Nestorius' rejection of the term 'Theotokos', which had long been used throughout the Church, was a minimizing of the essence of salvation and the God-man of Christ. He aggressively attacked Nestorius and his teaching. In response, Nestorius planned to have Cyril condemned, with Emperor Theodosius' support. Cyril appealed to Rome, and in 430 a council led by Pope Celestine condemned Nestorianism. He gave Nestorius ten days to recant, which he did not.

6. Nestorius persuaded Theodosius II to call an Ecumenical Council in Ephesus on Pentecost of 431 (the 3rd Ecumenical Council). Many of the Eastern bishops were not wholly in agreement with Nestorius, but they were fearful of Cyril's aggressive ways. Eastern bishops were late in arriving for the Council – Western and North African bishops (supporting Cyril) had arrived and so were in majority. Although in Ephesus, Nestorius refused multiple summons to attend. Cyril convened the Council, his position was affirmed, and Nestorius was condemned. Four days later the Eastern bishops arrived, convened their own council, and condemned Cyril. Theodosius II wanted to resolve the conflict by deposing both Nestorius and Cyril, but Cyril returned to Alexandria and Nestorius resigned.
7. In 432 Cyril accepted an Eastern document of faith: "Christ is complete God and complete man... He is of one nature with the Father in divinity and one nature with us in humanity... We confess that the Holy Virgin is Theotokos...", and peace was restored.
8. But Cyril had said, "Christ is one nature of God the Word Incarnate". To him this did not mean a merging of man and God, but only their union in one Person. Some of his followers saw any distinction of the two natures of Christ as subversion of all Christianity and a denial that deification of man was a goal of salvation, believing that deification is the destruction within oneself of everything human.
9. In 444 Cyril died and open rebellion immediately broke out against the agreement of 432, led by Archimandrite Eutyches of Constantinople. He said that the humanity of Christ was different from ours, and that it was irreverent to compare Christ with man. Eutyches refused to confess the two natures of Christ. In support of Eutyches, Theodosius II called a synod in Ephesus on August 8, 449. It became known as the 'Synod of Robbers', or the 'Robbers' Council'. Dioscorus, the successor of Cyril, was ordered by Theodosius II to acquit Eutyches at this synod, and to destroy all opposition to the doctrine of one nature of Christ. This synod, marked by open conflict and enforcement by militia, was seen as divisive and ineffective.
10. Pope Leo I of Rome (440-461) obtained an edict from Western Emperor Valentinian establishing superiority of the Roman Pope over all Western bishops.
11. Theodosius II died and was replaced by his sister Empress Pulcheria, who had married Marcian. They called for an Ecumenical Council (the 4th) in Nicea, in hopes of resolving the conflict. That council's location was changed to a suburb of Constantinople called Chalcedon. It convened on October 8 or 451. In anticipation, Pope Leo of Rome had submitted an epistle known as 'Leo's Tome', supporting the doctrine of two natures of Christ. At this Council both the 'Robber's Council' and Dioscorus were condemned, and the 'Dogma of Chalcedon' was enacted (see Readings), which became the theological center of the Christian Church. This Council also made Constantinople and Jerusalem Patriarchates and confirmed Constantinople as the center of the Christian Church. In Egypt, the Fourth Ecumenical Council's actions seemed a betrayal of Cyril's precepts. Syrian monks joined the Egyptians in this; Syrian and Egyptian masses began to see the power of the Empire as a hated yoke.
12. Eutyches persisted in his heresy, also called Monophysitism, saying that Christ had one nature, divine, not human, and that His humanity was absorbed by His Deity. This spread rapidly among churches in Syria, Egypt, North Africa, Ethiopia and Armenia. By 475 Monophysites in Antioch and Alexandria had elected their own patriarchs. In 482 the Eastern Emperor published a decree

rejecting the Tome of Leo and the Council of Chalcedon. The Monophysite patriarchs of Antioch and Alexandria signed it, thus legitimizing Monophysitism.

13. In 484 Pope Felix III of Rome demanded that Patriarch Acacius of Constantinople, who supported compromise, accept Leo's Tome and the Council of Chalcedon. Acacius refused. Felix deposed and excommunicated Acacius, thus beginning the first schism with Rome, which lasted until 518. Most Christians and monks in Syria and Egypt became Monophysites; a notable exception was Saint Sabas of Palestine and his monks. Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann calls this reaction to Chalcedon the 'first great tragedy of the Christian world'.
14. While Schmemmann's observation is certainly true, **it is very important to realize that through these heretical struggles and especially through the threats of Arianism, Monophysitism and the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon the Orthodox Church expresses and defends its beliefs in the Trinity and the divine and human natures of Christ – and that unlike many other forms of Christianity those beliefs have remained the same for 1,500 years and will do so until our Lord comes again!**