

Nestorius, Were Jesus and Christ United?

Through Plato, the Gnostics, and others, a fading knowledge from the Mysteries reached far into the centuries that followed Christ. The Human consisted of body, soul, and spirit. The way of the flesh can corrupt the soul. The spirit must lead. Were other beings of the Heavenly Hosts able to incarnate into human bodies? Or did they lead humans as inspiring spirits who hovered behind them? Had any non-human being of the heavens ever experienced death? The knowledge base at this time did not believe that a spiritual being of the hierarchies could take on a physical body. Only a special God, the Logos, could do that because through Him all things had been made. All Mysteries pointed to a future when the Logos would come but the question of how deeply the Logos could become a human remained unanswered.

Arius had contended that although all three gods of the Trinity are One, they are not all the same nor all of the same substance. The Son god, the Logos, and the Holy Spirit were different from the Father. Following this debate about the divine nature, comes Bishop Nestorius and the debate on Christ's human nature. Nestorius believed that Christ, as a divine spirit, entered the human body prepared by Jesus at the baptism and over the next 3 years becomes fully human, becomes fully Jesus-Christ – but not as the old human; rather, He becomes the new human, the new Adam that can overcome death through the resurrection. Grunevald's Issenheim Altarpiece seems to depict this with John the Baptist, the representative of the highest of old Man, the one who could witness the integration of God and Man, pointing at the crucified Christ and speaking "He must increase; I must decrease."

The lack of understanding of the Mysteries and what is meant by the "members" of the human being, or a modern understanding of what was meant by body, soul, and spirit, has led to great confusion not only today but also in the time of Nestorius.

From the research of Ben Green of Villanova's School of Theology we read, "The 5th century controversy of Bishop Nestorius of Constantinople and Bishop Cyril of Alexandria centered on the Person of Jesus Christ: To what extent is he human? To what extent divine? And to what extent and how are his humanity and divinity united? ...

The Antiochene School (represented by Nestorius) and the Alexandrian School (represented by Cyril) both held the "twoness" (humanity and divinity) and the "oneness" (unity of the humanity and divinity) of Christ. On the moderate side of each school, the differences were in the emphasis on either twoness or oneness, and also in the terminology used for expressing twoness and oneness. When the positions were expressed in their extreme senses, however, the understanding of the meanings of twoness and oneness was also at odds. In other words, viewed in the extreme, the issue became fundamental: the Antiochenes saw the Alexandrian Christ as a divine being without a real humanity (as in Apollinarius' Christology); and when the Alexandrians looked at the Antiochene Christ, they thought they were seeing double. Thus the challenge for understanding the debate between Nestorius and Cyril is to distinguish the moderate from the extreme. Each of these theologians can be seen to represent either the moderate or the extreme position of his school of thought."ⁱ

From Wikipedia we find, “Nestorius (c. 386 – c. 451) was Archbishop of Constantinople from 10 April 428 to 22 June 431. Drawing on his studies at the School of Antioch, his teachings, which included a rejection of the long-used title of Theotokos ("Mother of God") for the Virgin Mary, brought him into conflict with other prominent churchmen of the time, most notably Cyril of Alexandria, who accused him of heresy. Nestorius sought to defend himself at the First Council of Ephesus in 431, but instead he found himself formally condemned for heresy and removed from his see. Thereafter he retired to a monastery, where he asserted his orthodoxy for the rest of his life. Despite his acquiescence, many of his supporters split with the rest of the church in the Nestorian Schism, and over the next decades a number of them relocated to Persia. Thereafter Nestorianism became the official position of the Church of the East.”
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nestorius>

ⁱ Ben Green, “Nestorius and Cyril: 5th Century Christological Division and Recent Progress in Reconciliation”, Villanova Univ. concept.journals.villanova.edu/article/download/259/223