

# The Council Of Ephesus - 431 A.D.

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## Introduction

**Nestorius**, who had been condemned in a council at Rome on 11 August 430, asked the emperor Theodosius II to summon this council. The emperor therefore decided to summon it together with his co-emperor Valentinian III and with the agreement of **Pope Celestine I**. Theodosius's letter of 19 November 430 requested all those who had been summoned to be present at Ephesus on 7 June 431, the feast of Pentecost.

On 22 June, however,

- before the arrival either of the Roman legates or the eastern bishops led by **John of Antioch**,
- **Cyril of Alexandria** began the council.
- **Nestorius** was summoned three times but did not come.
- His teaching was examined and judgment passed upon it, which **197** bishops subscribed at once and others later accepted.

Shortly afterwards John of Antioch and the easterners arrived: they refused communion with Cyril and set up another council. **The Roman legates** (the bishops Arcadius and Projectus and the priest Philip), on arriving, **joined Cyril** and confirmed the sentence against Nestorius. Then the council in its fifth session on 17 July excommunicated John and his party.

The documents of **the Cyrilline council**, the only one which is **ecumenical**, are included below and are as follows.

1. The central dogmatic act of the council is its judgment about whether the second letter of Cyril to Nestorius, or Nestorius's second letter to Cyril, was in conformity with the Nicene creed which was recited at the opening of the council's proceedings.
  - o [Cyril's letter](#) was declared by the fathers to be in agreement with Nicaea,
  - o [Nestorius's](#) was [condemned](#)Both are here printed. Mention is made of Cyril's letter in the definition of Chalcedon.
2. [The 12 anathemas](#) and [the preceding explanatory letter](#), which had been produced by *Cyril* and the *synod of Alexandria* in 430 and sent to Nestorius, **were read at Ephesus and included in the proceedings**.
3. [The decision about Nestorius](#).
4. [The letter of the council advising all the bishops, clergy and people about the condemnation of John of Antioch](#); and some paragraphs dealing with the discipline of the Nestorian party.
5. [A decree on the faith](#), approved in the sixth session on 22 July, which confirmed the Nicene creed, ordered adherence to that alone and forbade the production of new creeds.

6. [A definition against the Messalians.](#)
7. [A decree about the autonomy of the church of Cyprus.](#)

Both councils sent legates to the emperor Theodosius, who approved neither and sent the bishops away. Nestorius had already been given permission to revisit his monastery at Antioch, and on 25 October 431 Maximianus was ordained patriarch at Constantinople. **The decrees of the council were approved by Pope Sixtus III** shortly after his own ordination on 31 July 432.

The reconciliation between the Cyrilline party and the eastern bishops was not easy. In the end, on 23 April 433, Cyril and John of Antioch made peace. John's profession of faith was accepted by Cyril and became the [doctrinal formula of union](#). It is included here, together with [Cyril's letter](#) in which he at some length praises John's profession and accepts it, adding to it some explanation about his own expressions; this letter is [mentioned in the definition of Chalcedon](#). Shortly afterwards, probably in 436, Nestorius was definitely sent into exile by the emperor .

The English translation is from the Greek text, which is the more authoritative version.

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## Second letter of Cyril to Nestorius

[Declared by the council of Ephesus to be in agreement with Nicaea]

Cyril sends greeting in the Lord to the most religious and reverend fellow-minister Nestorius

I understand that there are some who are talking rashly of the reputation in which I hold your reverence, and that this is frequently the case when meetings of people in authority give them an opportunity. I think they hope in this way to delight your ears and so they spread abroad uncontrolled expressions. They are people who have suffered no wrong, but have been exposed by me for their own profit, one because he oppressed the blind and the poor, a second because he drew a sword on his mother, a third because he stole someone else's money in collusion with a maidservant and since then has lived with such a reputation as one would hardly wish for one's worst enemy. For the rest I do not intend to spend more words on this subject in order not to vaunt my own mediocrity above my teacher and master or above the fathers. For however one may try to live, it is impossible to escape the malice of evil people, whose mouths are full of cursing and bitterness and who will have to defend themselves before the judge of all.

But I turn to a subject more fitting to myself and remind you as a brother in Christ always to be very careful about what you say to the people in matters of teaching and of your thought on the faith. You should bear in mind that to scandalise even one of these little ones that believe in Christ lays you open to unendurable wrath. If the number of those who are distressed is very large, then surely we should use every skill and care to remove scandals and to expound the healthy word of faith to those who seek the truth. The most effective way to achieve this end will be zealously to occupy ourselves with the words of *the holy fathers*, to esteem their words, to examine our words to see if we are holding to their faith as it is written, to conform our thoughts to their correct and irrefragable teaching.

The holy and great synod, therefore, stated that

- *1. the only begotten Son, begotten of God the Father according to nature, true God from true God, the light from the light, the one through whom the Father made all things, came down, became incarnate, became man,*
- *2. suffered, rose on the third day and ascended to heaven.*

● 1. We too ought to follow these words and these teachings and consider what is meant by saying that the Word from God took flesh and became man. For we do not say that the *nature* of the Word was changed and became flesh, nor that he was turned into a whole man made of body and soul. Rather do we claim that the Word in an unspeakable, inconceivable manner united to himself **hypostatically** flesh enlivened by a rational soul, and so became man and was called son of man, not by God's will alone or good pleasure, nor by the assumption of a person alone. Rather did **two different natures come together to form a unity**, and from both arose one Christ, one Son. It was **not as though the distinctness of the natures was destroyed by the union**, but divinity and humanity together made perfect for us one Lord and one Christ, together marvellously and mysteriously combining to form a unity. So he who existed and was begotten of the Father before all ages is also said to have been begotten according to the flesh of a woman, without the divine nature either beginning to exist in the holy virgin, or needing of itself a second begetting after that from his Father. (For it is absurd and stupid to speak of the one

who existed before every age and is coeternal with the Father, needing a second beginning so as to exist.) The Word is said to have been begotten according to the flesh, because for us and for our salvation he united what was human to himself hypostatically and came forth from a woman. For he was not first begotten of the holy virgin, a man like us, and then the Word descended upon him; but from the very womb of his mother he was so united and then underwent begetting according to the flesh, making his own the begetting of his own flesh.

- 2. In a similar way we say that he suffered and rose again, not that the Word of God suffered blows or piercing with nails or any other wounds in his own nature (for the divine, being without a body, is incapable of suffering), but because the body which became his own suffered these things, he is said to have suffered them for us. For he was without suffering, while his body suffered. Something similar is true of his dying. For by nature the Word of God is of itself immortal and incorruptible and life and life-giving, but since on the other hand his own body by God's grace, as the apostle says, tasted death for all, the Word is said to have suffered death for us, not as if he himself had experienced death as far as his own nature was concerned (it would be sheer lunacy to say or to think that), but because, as I have just said, his flesh tasted death. So too, when his flesh was raised to life, we refer to this again as his resurrection, not as though he had fallen into corruption--God forbid--but because his body had been raised again.

So we shall confess one Christ and one Lord. We do not adore the man along with the Word, so as to avoid any appearance of division by using the word "with". But we adore him as one and the same, because the body is not other than the Word, and takes its seat with him beside the Father, again not as though there were two sons seated together but only one, united with his own flesh. **If, however, we reject the hypostatic union as being either impossible or too unlovely for the Word, we fall into the fallacy of speaking of two sons.** We shall have to distinguish and speak both of the man as honoured with the title of son, and of the Word of God as by nature possessing the name and reality of sonship, each in his own way. We ought not, therefore, to split into two sons the one Lord Jesus Christ. Such a way of presenting a correct account of the faith will be quite unhelpful, even though some do speak of a union of persons. For scripture does not say that the Word united the person of a man to himself, but that he became flesh. The Word's becoming flesh means nothing else than that he partook of flesh and blood like us; he made our body his own, and came forth a man from woman without casting aside his deity, or his generation from God the Father, but rather in his assumption of flesh remaining what he was.

**This is the account of the true faith everywhere professed.** So shall we find that the holy fathers believed. So have they dared to call the holy virgin, *mother of God*, not as though the nature of the Word or his godhead received the origin of their being from the holy virgin, but because there was born from her his holy body rationally ensouled, with which the Word was hypostatically united and is said to have been begotten in the flesh. These things I write out of love in Christ exhorting you as a brother and calling upon you before Christ and the elect angels, to hold and teach these things with us, in order to preserve the peace of the churches and that the priests of God may remain in an unbroken bond of concord and love.

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## Second letter of Nestorius to Cyril

[condemned by the council of Ephesus]

Nestorius sends greeting in the Lord to the most religious and reverend fellow-minister Cyril. I pass over the insults against us contained in your extraordinary letter. They will, I think, be cured by my patience and by the answer which events will offer in the course of time. On one matter, however, I cannot be silent, as silence would in that case be very dangerous. On that point, therefore avoiding longwindedness as far as I can, I shall attempt a brief discussion and try to be as free as possible from repelling obscurity and undigestible prolixity. I shall begin from the wise utterances of your reverence, setting them down word for word. What then are the words in which your remarkable teaching finds expression ?

"The holy and great synod states that the only begotten Son, begotten of God the Father according to nature, true God from true God, the light from the light, the one through whom the Father made all things, came down, became incarnate, became man, suffered, rose."

These are the words of your reverence and you may recognise them. Now listen to what we say, which takes the form of a brotherly exhortation to piety of the type of which the great apostle Paul gave an example in addressing his beloved Timothy: "Attend to the public reading of scripture, to preaching, to teaching. For by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers". Tell me, what does "attend" mean? By reading in a superficial way the tradition of those holy men (you were guilty of a pardonable ignorance), you concluded that they said that the Word who is coeternal with the Father was passible. Please look more closely at their language and you will find out that that divine choir of fathers never said that the consubstantial godhead was capable of suffering, or that the whole being that was coeternal with the Father was recently born, or that it rose

again, seeing that it had itself been the cause of resurrection of the destroyed temple. If you apply my words as fraternal medicine, I shall set the words of the holy fathers before you and shall free them from the slander against them and through them against the holy scriptures.

"I believe", they say, "also in our Lord Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son". See how they first lay as foundations "Lord" and "Jesus" and "Christ" and "only begotten" and "Son", the names which belong jointly to the divinity and humanity. Then they build on that foundation the tradition of the incarnation and resurrection and passion. In this way, by prefixing the names which are common to each nature, they intend to avoid separating expressions applicable to sonship and lordship and at the same time escape the danger of destroying the distinctive character of the natures by absorbing them into the one title of "Son". In this Paul was their teacher who, when he remembers the divine becoming man and then wishes to introduce the suffering, first mentions "Christ", which, as I have just said, is the common name of both natures and then adds an expression which is appropriate to both of the natures. For what does he say? "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped", and so on until, "he became obedient unto death, even death on a cross". For when he was about to mention the death, to prevent anyone supposing that God the Word suffered, he says "Christ", which is a title that expresses in one person both the impassible and the passible natures, in order that Christ might be called without impropriety both impassible and passible impassible in godhead, passible in the nature of his body.

I could say much on this subject and first of all that those holy fathers, when they discuss the economy, speak not of the generation but of the Son becoming man. But I recall the promise of brevity that I made at the beginning and that both restrains my discourse and moves me on to the second subject of your reverence. In that I applaud your division of natures into manhood and godhead and their conjunction in one person. I also applaud your statement that God the Word needed no second generation from a woman, and your confession that the godhead is incapable of suffering. Such statements are truly orthodox and equally opposed to the evil opinions of all heretics about the Lord's natures. If the remainder was an attempt to introduce some hidden and incomprehensible wisdom to the ears of the readers, it is for your sharpness to decide. In my view these subsequent views seemed to subvert what came first. They suggested that he who had at the beginning been proclaimed as impassible and incapable of a second generation had somehow become capable of suffering and freshly created, as though what belonged to God the Word by nature had been destroyed by his conjunction with his temple or as though people considered it not enough that the sinless temple, which is inseparable from the divine nature, should have endured birth and death for sinners, or finally as though the Lord's voice was not deserving of credence when it cried out to the Jews: "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." He did not say, "Destroy my godhead and in three days it will be raised up."

Again I should like to expand on this but am restrained by the memory of my promise. I must speak therefore but with brevity. Holy scripture, wherever it recalls the Lord's economy, speaks of the birth and suffering not of the godhead but of the humanity of Christ, so that *the holy virgin is more accurately termed mother of Christ than mother of God*. Hear these words that the gospels proclaim: "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham." It is clear that God the Word was not the son of David. Listen to another witness if you will: "Jacob begat Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called the Christ." Consider a further piece of evidence: "Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, she was found to be with child of the holy Spirit." But who would ever consider that the godhead of the only begotten was a creature of the Spirit? Why do we need to mention: "the mother of Jesus was there"? And again what of: "with Mary the mother of Jesus"; or "that which is conceived in her is of the holy Spirit"; and "Take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt"; and "concerning his Son, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh"? Again, scripture says when speaking of his passion: "God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh"; and again "Christ died for our sins" and "Christ having suffered in the flesh"; and "This is", not "my godhead", but "my body, broken for you".

Ten thousand other expressions witness to the human race that they should not think that it was the godhead of the Son that was recently killed but the flesh which was joined to the nature of the godhead. (Hence also Christ calls himself the lord and son of David: "What do you think of the Christ? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David." Jesus answered and said to them, "How is it then that David inspired by the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, "The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand"?". He said this as being indeed son of David according to the flesh, but his Lord according to his godhead.) The body therefore is the temple of the deity of the Son, a temple which is united to it in a high and divine conjunction, so that the divine nature accepts what belongs to the body as its own. Such a confession is noble and worthy of the gospel traditions. But to use the expression "accept as its own" as a way of diminishing the properties of the conjoined flesh, birth, suffering and entombment, is a mark of those whose minds are led astray, my brother, by Greek thinking or are sick with the lunacy of Apollinarius and Arius or the other heresies or rather something more serious than these.

For it is necessary for such as are attracted by the name "propriety" to make God the Word share, because of this same propriety, in being fed on milk, in gradual growth, in terror at the time of his passion and in need of angelical assistance. I make no mention of circumcision and sacrifice and sweat and hunger, which all belong to the flesh and are adorable as having taken place for our sake. But it would be false to apply such ideas to the deity and would involve us in just accusation because of our calumny.

These are the *traditions of the holy fathers*. These are the *precepts of the holy scriptures*. In this way does someone write in a godly way about the divine mercy and power, "Practise these duties, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress". This is what Paul says to all. The care you take in labouring for those who have been scandalised is well taken and we are grateful to you both for the thought you devote to things divine and for the concern you have even for those who live here. But you should realise that you have been misled either by some here who have been deposed by the holy synod for *Manichaeism* or by clergy of your own persuasion. In fact the church daily progresses here and through the grace of Christ there is such an increase among the people that those who behold it cry out with the words of the prophet, "The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the water covers the sea". As for our sovereigns, they are in great joy as the light of doctrine is spread abroad and, to be brief, because of the state of all the heresies that fight against God and of the orthodoxy of the church, one might find that verse fulfilled "The house of Saul grew weaker and weaker and the house of David grew stronger and stronger".

This is our advice from a brother to a brother. "If anyone is disposed to be contentious", Paul will cry out through us to such a one, "we recognize no other practice, neither do the churches of God". I and those with me greet all the brotherhood with you in Christ. May you remain strong and continue praying for us, most honoured and reverent lord.

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### Third letter of Cyril to Nestorius

[Read at the council of Ephesus and included in the proceedings . We omit the preface of the letter]

We believe in one God . . . [Nicene Creed]

Following in all points the confessions of the holy fathers, which they made *with the holy Spirit speaking in them*, and following the direction of their opinions and going as it were in the royal way, we say that **the only-begotten Word of God, who was begotten from the very essence of the Father, true God from true God, the light from the light and the one through whom all things in heaven and earth were made, for our salvation came down and emptying himself he became incarnate and was made man.** *This means that*

- he took flesh from the holy virgin and made it his own, undergoing a birth like ours from her womb and coming forth a man from a woman.
- He did not cast aside what he was, but although he assumed flesh and blood, he remained what he was, God in nature and truth.
- We do not say that his flesh was turned into the nature of the godhead or that the unspeakable Word of God was changed into the nature of the flesh. For he (the Word) is unalterable and absolutely unchangeable and remains always the same as the scriptures say. For although visible as a child and in swaddling cloths, even while he was in the bosom of the virgin that bore him, as God he filled the whole of creation and was fellow ruler with him who begot him. For the divine is without quantity and dimension and cannot be subject to circumscription.

We confess the Word to have been made **one with the flesh hypostatically**, and we adore one Son and Lord, Jesus Christ. We do **not** divide him into parts and separate man and God in him, as though the two natures were mutually united only through a **unity of dignity and authority**; that would be an empty expression and nothing more. Nor do we give the name Christ in one sense to the Word of God and in another to him who was born of woman, but we know only one Christ, the Word from God the Father with his own flesh. *As man he was anointed with us, even though he himself gives the Spirit* to those who are worthy to receive it and not in measure, as the blessed evangelist John says.

But we do not say that the Word of God dwelt as in an ordinary man born of the holy virgin, in order that Christ may not be thought of as a God-bearing man. For even though "the Word dwelt among us", and it is also said that in Christ dwelt "all the fullness of the godhead bodily", we understand that, having become flesh, **the manner of his indwelling is not defined in the same way as he is said to dwell among the saints**, he was united by nature and not turned into flesh and he made his indwelling in such a way as we may say that the soul of man does in his own body.

There is therefore one Christ and Son and Lord, but **not** with the sort of conjunction that a man might have with God as **unity of dignity or authority**. Equality of honour by itself is unable to unite natures. For Peter and John were equal in honour to each other, being both of them apostles and holy disciples, but they were two, not one. Neither do we understand the manner of conjunction to be one of **juxtaposition** for this is not enough for natural union. Nor yet is it a question of **relative participation**, as we ourselves, being united to the Lord, are as it is written in the words of scripture "one spirit with him". Rather do we deprecate the term "conjunction" as being inadequate to express the idea of union.

Nor do we call the Word from God the Father, the God or Lord of Christ. To speak in that way would appear to split into two the one Christ and Son and Lord and we might in this way fall under the charge of blasphemy, making him the God and Lord of himself. For, as we have already said, the Word of God was united hypostatically with the flesh and is God of all and Lord of the universe, but is neither his own slave or master. For it is foolish or rather impious to think or to speak in this way. It is true that he called the Father "God" even though *he was* himself God by nature and of his being, we are not ignorant of the fact that at the same time as he was God he also became man, and so was *subject to God according to the law that is suitable to the nature of manhood*. But how should he become God or Lord of himself? Consequently as man and as far as it was fitting for him within the limits of his self-emptying it is said that he was subject to God like ourselves. So he came to be under the law while at the same time himself speaking the law and being a lawgiver like God.

When speaking of Christ we avoid the expression: "I worship him who is carried because of the one who carries him; because of him who is unseen, I worship the one who is seen." It is shocking to say in this connexion: "The assumed shares the name of God with him who assumes." To speak in this way once again divides into two Christs and puts the man separately by himself and God likewise by himself. This saying denies openly the union, according to which one is not worshipped alongside the other, nor do both share in the title "God", but Jesus Christ is considered as one, the only begotten Son, honoured with one worship, together with his own flesh.

We also confess that **the only begotten Son** born of God the Father, although according to his own nature he was not subject to suffering, suffered in the flesh for us according to the scriptures, and was in his crucified body, and **without himself suffering made his own the sufferings of his own flesh**, for "by the grace of God he tasted death for all". For that purpose he gave his own body to death though he was by nature life and the resurrection, in order that, having trodden down death by his own unspeakable power, he might first in his own flesh become the firstborn from the dead and "the first fruits of them that sleep". And that he might make a way for human nature to return to incorruption by the grace of God, as we have just said, "he tasted death for all" and on the third day he returned to life, having robbed the underworld. Accordingly, even though it is said that "through man came the resurrection of the dead", yet we understand that man to have been the Word which came from God, through whom the power of death was overcome. At the right time he will come as one Son and Lord in the glory of the Father, to judge the world in justice, as it is written.

We will necessarily add this also. Proclaiming the death according to the flesh of the only begotten Son of God, that is Jesus Christ, and professing his return to life from the dead and his ascension into heaven, we offer the unbloody *worship* [sacrificii servitutum] in the churches and so proceed to the mystical thanksgivings and are sanctified having partaken of the holy *flesh* [corpus] and precious blood of Christ, the saviour of us all. This we receive not as ordinary flesh, heaven forbid, nor as that of a man who has been made holy and joined to the Word by union of honour, or who had a divine indwelling, but as truly the life-giving and *real flesh of the Word* [ut vere vivificatricem et *ipsius Verbi propriam factam*]. For being life by nature as God, when he became one with his own flesh, he made it also to be life-giving, as also he said to us: "Amen I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood" . For we must not think that it is the flesh of a man like us (for how can the flesh of man be life-giving by its own nature?), but as being made the *true flesh* [vere proprium eius factam] of the one who for our sake became the son of man and was called so.

For we do not divide up the words of our Saviour in the gospels among two *hypostases or persons*. For the one and only Christ is not dual, even though he be considered to be from two distinct realities, brought together into an unbreakable union. In the same sort of way a human being, though he be composed of soul and body, is considered to be not dual, but rather one out of two. Therefore, in thinking rightly, we refer both the human and divine expressions to the same person. For when he speaks about himself in a divine manner as "he that sees me sees the Father", and "I and the Father are one", we think of his divine and unspeakable nature, according to which he is one with his own Father through identity of nature and is the "image and impress and brightness of his glory". But when, not dishonouring the measure of his humanity, he says to the Jews: "But now you seek to kill me, a man who has spoken the truth to you", again no less than before, we recognise that he who, because of his equality and likeness to God the Father is God the Word, is also within the limits of his humanity. For if it is necessary to believe that being God by nature he became flesh, that is man ensouled with a rational soul, whatever reason should anyone have for being ashamed at the expressions uttered by him should they happen to be suitable to him as man? For if he should reject words suitable to him as man, who was it that forced him to become a man like us? Why should he who submitted himself to voluntary self-emptying for our sake, reject expressions that are suitable for such self-emptying? All the expressions, therefore, that occur in the gospels are to be referred to one person, **the one enfleshed hypostasis of the Word**. For there is one Lord Jesus Christ, according to the scriptures.

Even though he is called "the apostle and high priest of our confession", as offering to the God and Father the confession of faith we make to him and through him to the God and Father and also to the holy Spirit, again we say that he is the natural and only-begotten Son of God and we shall not assign to another man apart from him the name and reality of priesthood. For **he became the "mediator between God and humanity" and the establisher of peace between them, offering himself for an odour of sweetness to the God and Father**. Therefore also he said: "Sacrifice and offering you would not, but a body you have prepared for me; [in burnt offerings and sacrifice for sin you have no pleasure]. Then I said, 'Behold I come to do your

will, O God', as it is written of me in the volume of the book". For our sake and not for his own he brought forward his own body in the odour of sweetness. Indeed, of what offering or sacrifice for himself would he have been in need, being as God superior to all manner of sin? For though "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God", and so we are prone to disorder and human nature has fallen into the weakness of sin, he is not so and consequently we are behind him in glory. How then can there be any further doubt that the true lamb was sacrificed for us and on our behalf? *The suggestion that he offered himself for himself as well as for us is impossible to separate from the charge of impiety.* For he never committed a fault at all, nor did he sin in any way. What sort of offering would he need then since there was no sin for which offering might rightly be made?

When he says of the Spirit, "he will glorify me", the correct understanding of this is *not* to say that the one Christ and Son was in need of glory from another and that he took glory from the holy Spirit, for his Spirit is not better than he nor above him. But because he used his own Spirit to display his godhead through his mighty works, he says that he has been glorified by him, just as if any one of us should perhaps say for example of his inherent strength or his knowledge of anything that they glorify him. For even though *the Spirit exists in his own hypostasis* and is thought of on his own, as being Spirit and not as Son, even so he is not alien to the Son. He has been called "the Spirit of truth", and Christ is the truth, and the Spirit was poured forth by the Son, as indeed the Son was poured forth from the God and Father. Accordingly the Spirit worked many strange things through the hand of the holy apostles and so glorified him after the ascension of our lord Jesus Christ into heaven. For it was believed that he is God by nature and works through his own Spirit. For this reason also he said: "He (the Spirit) will take what is mine and declare it to you". But we do not say that the Spirit is wise and powerful through some sharing with another, for he is all perfect and in need of no good thing. Since he is the Spirit of the power and wisdom of the Father, that is the Son, he is himself, evidently, wisdom and power.

Therefore, because the holy virgin bore in the flesh God who was united hypostatically with the flesh, *for that reason* we call her **mother of God**, not as though the nature of the Word had the beginning of its existence from the flesh (for "the Word was in the beginning and the Word was God and the Word was with God", and he made the ages and is coeternal with the Father and craftsman of all things), but because, as we have said, he united to himself hypostatically the human and underwent a birth according to the flesh from her womb. This was not as though he needed necessarily or for his own nature a birth in time and in the last times of this age, but *in order that* he might bless the beginning of our existence, in order that seeing that it was a woman that had given birth to him united to the flesh, the curse against the whole race should thereafter cease which was consigning all our earthly bodies to death, and in order that the removal through him of the curse, "In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children", should demonstrate the truth of the words of the prophet: "Strong death swallowed them Up", and again, "God has wiped every tear away from all face". It is *for this cause* that we say that in his economy he blessed marriage and, when invited, went down to Cana in Galilee with his holy apostles.

We have been taught to hold these things by

- the holy *apostles* and evangelists and by
- all the divinely inspired *scriptures* and by the true confession of
- the blessed *fathers*.

To all these your reverence ought to agree and subscribe without any deceit. What is required for your reverence to **anathematise** we subjoin to this epistle.

## **Twelve Anathemas Proposed by Cyril and accepted by the Council of Ephesus**

1. If anyone does not confess that Emmanuel is God in truth, and therefore that the holy virgin is the mother of God (for she bore in a fleshly way the Word of God become flesh, let him be **anathema**.
2. If anyone does not confess that the Word from God the Father has been united by hypostasis with the flesh and is one Christ with his own flesh, and is therefore God and man together, let him be **anathema**.
3. If anyone divides in the one Christ the hypostases after the union, joining them only by a conjunction of dignity or authority or power, and not rather by a coming together in a union by nature, let him be **anathema**.
4. If anyone distributes between the two persons or hypostases the expressions used either in the gospels or in the apostolic writings, whether they are used by the holy writers of Christ or by him about himself, and ascribes some to him as to a man, thought of separately from the Word from God, and others, as befitting God, to him as to the Word from God the Father, let him be **anathema**.
5. If anyone dares to say that Christ was a God-bearing man and not rather God in truth, being by nature one Son, even as "the Word became flesh", and is made partaker of blood and flesh precisely like us, let him be **anathema**.

6. If anyone says that the Word from God the Father was the God or master of Christ, and does not rather confess the same both God and man, the Word having become flesh, according to the scriptures, let him be **anathema**.
7. If anyone says that as man Jesus was activated by the Word of God and was clothed with the glory of the Only-begotten, as a being separate from him, let him be **anathema**.
8. If anyone dares to say that the man who was assumed ought to be worshipped and glorified together with the divine Word and be called God along with him, while being separate from him, (for the addition of "with" must always compel us to think in this way), and will not rather worship Emmanuel with one veneration and send up to him one doxology, even as "the Word became flesh", let him be **anathema**.
9. If anyone says that the one Lord Jesus Christ was glorified by the Spirit, as making use of an alien power that worked through him and as having received from him the power to master unclean spirits and to work divine wonders among people, and does not rather say that it was his own proper Spirit through whom he worked the divine wonders, let him be **anathema**.
10. The divine scripture says Christ became "the high priest and apostle of our confession"; he offered himself to God the Father in an odour of sweetness for our sake. If anyone, therefore, says that it was not the very Word from God who became our high priest and apostle, when he became flesh and a man like us, but as it were another who was separate from him, in particular a man from a woman, or if anyone says that he offered the sacrifice also for himself and not rather for us alone (for he who knew no sin needed no offering), let him be **anathema**.
11. If anyone does not confess that the flesh of the Lord is life-giving and belongs to the Word from God the Father, but maintains that it belongs to another besides him, united with him in dignity or as enjoying a mere divine indwelling, and is not rather life-giving, as we said, since it became the flesh belonging to the Word who has power to bring all things to life, let him be **anathema**.
12. If anyone does not confess that the Word of God suffered in the flesh and was crucified in the flesh and tasted death in the flesh and became the first born of the dead, although as God he is life and life-giving, let him be **anathema**.
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## The judgment against Nestorius

The holy synod said: As, in addition to all else, the excellent Nestorius has declined to obey our summons and has not received the holy and God-fearing bishops we sent to him, we have of necessity started upon an investigation of his impieties. We have found him out thinking and speaking in an impious fashion, from his letters, from his writings that have been read out, and from the things that he has recently said in this metropolis which have been witnessed to by others; and as a result we have been **compelled** of necessity both by

- the canons and by
- the letter of our most holy father and fellow servant **Celestine, bishop of the church of the Romans**, to issue this sad condemnation against him, though we do so with many tears.

Our lord Jesus Christ, who has been blasphemed by him, has determined through this most holy synod that the same Nestorius should be stripped of his episcopal dignity and removed from the college of priests.

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## Synodical letter about the expulsion of the eastern bishops (et al.)

The holy and ecumenical synod, gathered together in Ephesus at the behest of the most pious princes, [sends greeting] to the bishops, priests, deacons and the whole people in every province and city.

When we had gathered together in accordance with the pious decree in the metropolis of Ephesus, some separated themselves from us, a little more than *thirty* in number. The leader of this apostasy was John, bishop of Antioch, and their names are as follows: First the same **John, bishop of Antioch** in Syria, [the names of 33 other eastern bishops follow]



These men, despite the fact that they were members of the ecclesiastical community, had no licence either to do harm through their priestly dignity or to do good, because some among their number had already been deposed. Their support of the views of **Nestorius** and **Celestius** was clearly shown by their refusal to condemn Nestorius together with us. By a common decree the sacred synod has expelled them from ecclesiastical communion and deprived them of the exercise of their priestly office, through which they have been able to harm some and help others.

Since it is necessary that those who were absent from the synod and remained in the country or the city, on account of their own church affairs or because of their health, should not be ignorant of the decisions formulated concerning these matters, we make it known to your holinesses that if any **metropolitan** of a province dissents from the holy and ecumenical synod and attaches himself to the assembly of the revolvers, or should do so later, or should he have adopted the opinions of Celestius, or do so in the future, such a one is deprived of all power to take steps against the bishops of his province. He is thereby cast out by the synod from all ecclesiastical communion and is deprived of all ecclesiastical authority. Instead he is to be subjected to the bishops of his own province and the surrounding metropolitans, provided they be orthodox, even to the extent of being completely deposed from the rank of bishop.

If any provincial **bishops** have absented themselves from the holy synod and have either attached themselves or attempted to attach themselves to the apostasy, or after subscribing the deposition of Nestorius have returned to the assembly of apostates, these, according to the decision of the holy synod, are to be deprived of the priesthood and deposed from their rank.

If any **clerics** either in city or country have been suspended by Nestorius and those with him from their priesthood because of their orthodoxy, we have thought it right that these should regain their proper rank; and in general we decree that those clerics who are in agreement with the orthodox and ecumenical synod should in no way be subject to those bishops who have revolted or may revolt from it. If any clerics should apostatise and in private or in public dare to hold the views of Nestorius or Celestius, it is thought right that such should stand deposed by the holy synod.

**Whoever** have been condemned of improper practices by the holy synod or by their own bishops, and have been uncanonically restored to communion and rank by Nestorius or his sympathisers, with their habitual lack of discrimination, such persons we have decreed gain nothing by this and are to remain deposed as before.

Similarly if **anyone** should wish in any way to upset the decisions in each point taken in the holy synod of Ephesus, the holy synod decides that if they are *bishops* or *clerics* they should be completely deprived of their own rank and if they are *laity* they should be excommunicated.

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## Definition of the faith at Nicaea [6th session 22 July 431]

The synod of Nicaea produced this creed: We believe ... [the Nicene Creed follows]

It seems fitting that all should assent to this holy creed. It is pious and sufficiently helpful for the whole world. But since *some pretend to confess and accept it, while at the same time distorting the force of its expressions to their own opinion* and so evading the truth, being sons of error and children of destruction, it has proved necessary to add **testimonies from the holy and orthodox fathers** that can **fill out the meaning they have** given to the words and their courage in proclaiming it. All those who have a clear and blameless faith will understand, interpret and proclaim it in this way.

When these documents had been read out, the holy synod decreed the following.

1. It is not permitted to produce or write or compose any other creed except the one which was defined by the holy fathers who were gathered together in the holy Spirit at Nicaea.
2. Any who dare to compose or bring forth or produce another creed for the benefit of those who wish to turn from Hellenism or Judaism or some other heresy to the knowledge of the truth, if they are *bishops* or *clerics* they should be deprived of their respective charges and if they are *laymen* they are to be anathematised.
3. In the same way if any should be discovered, whether bishops, clergy or laity, thinking or teaching the views expressed in his statement by the priest **Charisius** about the incarnation of the only-begotten Son of God or the disgusting, perverted views of **Nestorius**, which underlie them, these should be subject to the condemnation of this holy and ecumenical synod. A *bishop* clearly is to be stripped of his bishopric and deposed, a *cleric* to be deposed from the clergy, and a *lay person* is to be anathematised, as was said before.

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## Definition against the impious Messalians or Euchites

The most pious and religious bishops *Valerian* and *Amphilochius* came together to us and made a joint enquiry about the so called **Messalians** or **Euchites** or **Enthusiasts**, or whatever name this appalling heresy goes under, who dwell in the region of Pamphylia. We made investigation and the god-fearing and reverent Valerian produced a synodical document concerning these people, which had been drawn up in *great Constantinople* in the time of *Sisinnius* of blessed memory. When this had been read out in the presence of all, it was agreed that it had been well made and was correct. We all agreed, as did the most religious bishops Valerian and Amphilochius and all the pious bishops of the provinces of *Pamphylia* and *Lycaonia*, that what had been inscribed in the synodical document should be confirmed and in no way disobeyed, clearly without prejudice to *the acts of Alexandria*. Consequently those anywhere in that province who subscribed to the heresy of the Messalians or Enthusiasts, or who were suspected of the disease, whether clerical or lay, are to come together; if they **sign the anathemas** according to what was promulgated in the aforementioned synod, should they be clergy they should remain such and if laity they are to remain in communion. But if they decline and do not anathematise, if they are presbyters or deacons or hold any other rank in the church, they are to forfeit their clerical status and grade and communion, and if they are laity let them be anathematised.

In addition, those who have been condemned are not to be permitted to govern *monasteries*, lest tares be sown and increase. The vigorous and zealous execution of all these decrees is enjoined upon the reverent bishops Valerian and Amphilochius and the other reverent bishops throughout the whole province. Furthermore it seemed good that the filthy book of this heresy, which has been published and is called by them **Asceticon**, should be anathematised, as being composed by heretics, a copy of which the most pious and religious Valerian brought with him. Any other production savouring of the like impiety which is found anywhere is to be treated similarly.

In addition, when they come together, they should commit clearly to writing whatever conduces to the creation of concord, communion and order. But if any discussion should arise in connexion with the present business among the most godly bishops Valerian, Amphilochius and the other reverent bishops in the province, and if something difficult or ambiguous crops up, then in such a case it seems good that the godly bishops of Lycia and Lycaonia should be brought in, and the metropolitan of whatever province these choose should not be left out. In this way the disputed questions should through their means be brought to an appropriate solution.

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## Resolution : that the bishops of Cyprus may themselves conduct ordinations.

The holy synod declared:

The most reverent bishop **Rheginus** and with him **Zenon** and **Evagrius**, revered bishops of the province of *Cyprus*, have brought forward what is both an innovation against the ecclesiastical customs and the canons of the holy fathers and concerns the freedom of all. Therefore, since common diseases need more healing as they bring greater harm with them, if it has not been a continuous ancient custom for the bishop of Antioch to hold ordinations in Cyprus--as it is asserted in memorials and orally by the religious men who have come before the synod -- **the prelates of the holy churches of Cyprus shall, free from molestation and violence, use their right to perform by themselves the ordination of reverent bishops for their island, according to the canons of the holy fathers and the ancient custom.**

**The same principle will be observed for other dioceses and provinces everywhere.** None of the reverent bishops is to take possession of another province which has not been under his authority from the first or under that of his predecessors. Any one who has thus seized upon and subjected a province is to restore it, lest the canons of the fathers be transgressed and the arrogance of *secular power effect an entry through the cover of priestly office*. We must avoid bit by bit destroying the freedom which our lord Jesus Christ the liberator of all people, gave us through his own blood. It is therefore the pleasure of the holy and ecumenical synod to secure intact and inviolate the rights belonging to each province from the first, according to the custom which has been in force from of old. Each metropolitan has the right to take a copy of the proceedings for his own security. If any one produces a version which is at variance with what is here decided, the holy and ecumenical synod unanimously decrees it to be of no avail.

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## Formula of union between Cyrill and John of Antioch

We will state briefly what we are convinced of and profess about

- the God-bearing virgin and
- the manner of the incarnation of the only begotten Son of God --
  - **not by way of addition but in the manner of a full statement**, even as we have received and possess it from of old from
  - the holy *scriptures* and from
  - the *tradition* of the holy fathers,
  - adding nothing at all to the creed put forward by the holy fathers at Nicaea.

For, as we have just said, that creed is sufficient both for the knowledge of godliness and for the repudiation of all heretical false teaching. We shall speak not presuming to approach the unapproachable; but we confess our own weakness and so shut out those who would reproach us for investigating things beyond the human mind.

We confess, then, our lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God perfect God and perfect man of a rational soul and a body, begotten before all ages from the Father in his godhead, the same in the last days, for us and for our salvation, born of Mary the virgin, according to his humanity, one and the same **consubstantial with the Father in godhead** and **consubstantial with us in humanity**, for a union of two natures took place. Therefore we confess one Christ, one Son, one Lord. According to this understanding of the unconfused union, we confess the holy virgin to be the **mother of God** because God the Word took flesh and became man and from his very conception united to himself the temple he took from her. As to the evangelical and apostolic expressions about the Lord, we know that theologians treat some in common as of one person and distinguish others as of two natures, and interpret the god-befitting ones in connexion with the godhead of Christ and the lowly ones with his humanity.

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## Letter of Cyril to John of Antioch about peace

Having read these holy phrases and finding ourselves in agreement (for "there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism"), we have given glory to God who is the saviour of all and rejoice together that our churches and yours are at one in professing the same faith as the inspired *scriptures* and the *tradition* of our holy fathers. But since I discovered that there are some always eager to find fault, who buzz around like angry wasps and spit forth evil words against me, to the effect that I say that the holy body of Christ came down from heaven and not from the holy virgin, I thought it necessary in answer to them to say a little about this matter to you.

O fools, whose only competence is in slander! How did you become so perverted in thought and fall into such a sickness of idiocy? For you must surely know that **almost all our fight for the faith arose in connexion with our insistence that the holy virgin is the mother of God**. But if we claim that the holy body of our common saviour Christ is born from heaven and was not of her, why should she still be considered God-bearer? For whom indeed did she bear, if it is untrue that she bore Emmanuel according to the flesh? It is rather they who speak such nonsense against me who deserve to be ridiculed. For the holy prophet Isaiah does not lie when he says, "Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which is interpreted God with us". Again the holy Gabriel speaks total truth when he says to the blessed virgin: "Do not fear, Mary. You have found favour with God, and behold you will conceive in your womb and bear a son and you will call his name Jesus. For he will save his people from their sins".

But when we say that our lord Jesus Christ came from heaven and above, we do not apply such expressions as "from above" and "from heaven" to his holy flesh. Rather do we follow the divine Paul who clearly proclaimed: "The first man was of the earth, earthly, the second man is the Lord from heaven".

We also recall our Saviour who said: "No one has gone up into heaven except him who came down from heaven, the son of man". Yet he was born, as I have just said, from the holy virgin according to the flesh.

But since God the Word, who came down from above and from heaven, "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave", and was called son of man though all the while he remained what he was, that is God (for he is unchangeable and immutable by nature), he is said to have come down from heaven, since he is now understood to be one with his own flesh, and he has

therefore been designated the man from heaven, being both perfect in godhead and perfect in humanity and thought of as in one person. For there is one lord Jesus Christ, even though we do not ignore the difference of natures, out of which we say that the ineffable union was effected. As for those who say that there was a mixture or confusion or blending of God the Word with the flesh, let your holiness see fit to stop their mouths. For it is quite likely that some should spread it abroad that I have thought or said such things. But I am so far from thinking anything of the kind that I think that those are quite mad who suppose that "a shadow of change" is conceivable in connexion with the divine nature of the Word. For he remains what he is always and never changes, nor could he ever change or be susceptible of it. Furthermore we all confess that the Word of God is impassible though in his all-wise economy of the mystery he is seen to attribute to himself the sufferings undergone by his own flesh. So *the all-wise Peter* speaks of "Christ suffering for us in the flesh" and not in the nature of his unspeakable godhead. For in order that he might be believed to be the saviour of all, in accordance with our economic appropriation, as I said, he refers to himself the sufferings of his own flesh, in much the same way as is suggested through the voice of the prophet coming as it were from him in advance: "I gave my back to the smiters and my cheeks to blows; I hid not my face from shame and spitting" .

Let your holiness be persuaded and let no one else cherish any doubt, that **we everywhere follow the opinions of the holy fathers** especially those of our blessed and glorious father *Athanasius*, with whose opinions we differ not in the slightest. I would have added many of their testimonies, proving my opinions from theirs, had I not feared that the length of the letter would be made tedious thereby. We do not permit anyone in any way to upset *the defined faith* or the creed drawn up by the holy fathers who assembled at Nicaea as the times demanded. We give neither ourselves nor them the licence to alter any expression there or to change a single syllable, remembering the words: "Remove not the ancient landmarks which your fathers have set".

*For it was not they that spoke, but the Spirit of God the Father, who proceeds from him and who is not distinct from the Son in essence.* We are further confirmed in our view by the words of our holy spiritual teachers. For in the Acts of the Apostles it is written: "When they came to Mysia, they tried to go to Bithynia and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them". And the divine Paul writes as follows: "Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh, you are in the spirit, if the Spirit of God really dwells in you. And anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him". When, therefore, any of those who love to upset sound doctrine pervert my words to their way of thinking, your holiness should not be surprised at this, but should remember that *the followers of every heresy extract from inspired scripture the occasion of their error*, and that all heretics corrupt the true expressions of the holy Spirit with their own evil minds and they draw down on their own heads an inextinguishable flame.

Since therefore we have learnt that even the letter of our glorious father *Athanasius* to the blessed *Epicetus*, which is completely orthodox, has been corrupted and circulated by some, with the result that many have been injured therefore, thinking it both useful and necessary for the brethren, we have despatched to your holiness accurate copies of the original, unadulterated writings which we have.

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### Excerpt from the Council of Chalcedon

The Council of Chalcedon "has accepted the synodical letters of the blessed Cyril, pastor of the church in Alexandria, [to Nestorius](#) and [to the Orientals](#), as being well-suited to refuting Nestorius's mad folly and to providing an interpretation for those who in their religious zeal might desire understanding of the saving creed."