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## MODERN INTERPRETATIONS OF NESTORIUS

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### I. *Introduction*

Nestorius continues to be a problem for modern historians of doctrine. The problem arose in the fifth century when the church acting at the Council of Ephesus (431 A.D.) anathematized Nestorius, the Bishop of Constantinople, and pronounced Nestorianism a christological heresy. The decisions of the Council of Ephesus were accepted and re-affirmed at the Fourth (451 A.D.) and Fifth (553 A.D.) Ecumenical Councils. It must be said that "Nestorianism" as a special kind of doctrine could have been condemned as heretical without anathematizing anyone. The doctrine pronounced heretical could be called "dyoprosopatism." But such was not the case. Nestorius was condemned and exiled as a heretic, and he was judged on the basis of certain doctrines which he was accused of holding. From the moment of his excommunication until the present time there have been many expressions of uncertainty as to whether he really taught and believed what was defined and condemned as Nestorianism. Somewhat epigrammatically historians have been asking whether Nestorius himself was a Nestorian.

The purpose of this essay is to provide a factual review of contemporary answers to the question: "Was Nestorius a Nestorian?" Hence, in advance, we acknowledge that we cannot undertake the primary historical task, i.e., to construct from a fresh textual analysis the real teachings of Nestorius. Nor can we deal with the theological *implications* of the recent historical inquiries into Nestorius' christology. Unfortunately, most systematic theologians go their way as if nothing new had been uncovered by modern historical scholarship on the question of Nestorius' heresy or orthodoxy. In apparent dependence upon outdated summaries of the history of doctrine, they perpetuate the traditional verdict against Nestorius. This survey of modern critical studies on Nestorius may help to call the theologian's attention to the need for a re-examination of Nestorius' place in christology. A review of the evidence might then cause them to distinguish between Nestorius' actual teaching and "Nestorianism." Our concluding remarks will suggest briefly certain theological questions posed by this study.

Quite apart from the evidence deduced from the new texts published in our century, there are two other factors which should help to bring about a more favorable attitude towards Nestorius. First, the christological climate of modern theology is conditioned by a greater appreciation for the real humanity of Jesus, and a resolute rejection of docetism in every form. Nestorius was a representative

of Antiochian theology, which had always preserved a closer affinity with a grammatical, historical exegesis of the Bible. Biblical theology in our time can be seen in broad perspective more on the side of the Antiochian than on the Alexandrian interpretation of the Scriptures. The school of Antioch to a great extent saved the church's belief in the real humanity of Jesus, and this was due not in small measure to its closer adherence to the plain philological sense of the biblical texts. The second factor to which we refer is the ambiguity in the tradition itself on the question of Nestorius' heresy or orthodoxy. We shall amplify what is meant by this ambiguity in the tradition.

As early as Socrates, a fifth century writer of ecclesiastical history, Nestorius was regarded as a victim of political expediencies. Cyril of Alexandria had interpreted Nestorius' teaching in the direction of the archheretics, Paul of Samosata and Photinus. Socrates regarded this charge as a grave misrepresentation of the facts. Nestorius, he says, can be properly accused of obstinancy, ignorance, and vain pride, but this does not make him a heretic. He does not teach the mere humanity of Jesus; he does not deny the divinity of Christ; but he is scared of the term *Theotokos* because it might easily play into the hands of heathenish mythology in the sense of a woman giving birth to a god.<sup>1</sup> Nestorius reasoned that if Mary is called the "Mother of God" then this might help give rise to a sub-christian piety which holds the Virgin to be a goddess.

John of Antioch, Nestorius' erstwhile friend, and Pope Celestine of Rome ended up taking the side of Cyril against Nestorius, not for theological reasons, but for church-political reasons. They were more concerned about the peace and unity of the church than about christological subtleties. But there is no evidence that they held a different viewpoint from Nestorius. Actually, all the evidence indicates that they held precisely the same view. Therefore, they evaded any clear christological formulae. It is difficult to disagree with Harnack's thesis that Celestine saw no difference between Nestorius and Augustine.<sup>2</sup> Part of this picture is the fact that Rome's theology finally won out at the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.). Nestorius himself hailed the Chalcedonian Formula as a vindication of his own position, and the monophysitic followers of Cyril attacked Chalcedon as a comedy. While it was anathematizing Nestorius, it was canonizing his doctrine. Thus from both sides in the dispute it seems very probable that political factors as much as theological ones determined the role played by the Roman authority in the expulsion of Nestorius.

But the first one to do justice to Nestorius since Socrates wrote his *Ecclesiastical History* was Martin Luther. In his book *Von Conciliis und Kirchen* Luther admits that he cannot understand what the error of Nestorius was. Luther says that he like everyone else had

received a prejudiced account of Nestorius' doctrine through the pope's decrees to the effect that Nestorius held Christ to be nothing more than a mere man. But after re-opening the case for himself and studying more accurately the accounts of the charges and proceedings, Luther saw that the traditional ecclesiastical interpretations were false. Nestorius has been wrongly accused of teaching the double personality of Christ. Luther finds that Nestorius is earnest about Christ, about the *One* Christ, and does not regard Christ as two persons conjoined by a communion of minds or wills. Protestant Orthodoxy did not assimilate Luther's revision of the estimate of Nestorius, but reverted to the traditional Roman Catholic interpretation which classifies Nestorius among the followers of Paul of Samosata.<sup>3</sup>

In 1645 an anonymous Calvinist published a work the contents of which endeavored not only to rehabilitate Nestorius but vigorously to prove that his adversaries were heretics. The title indicated well the argument of the book: *Disputatio de suppositat, in qua plurima hactenus inaudita de Nestorio tanquam orthodoxo et de Cyrillo Alexandrino aliisque episcopis in synodum coactis tanquam haereticis demonstrantur*. This thesis provided the occasion for P. Petau to write his learned defense of St. Cyril in Book IV of his *De Incarnatione*, 1650.

To my knowledge the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries contributed no new insights into Nestorius' theology. But at the beginning of this century we witness a renaissance of interest in the teachings and significance of Nestorius. We shall now attempt to delineate the new course which the problem took.

## II. *Modern Interpretations of Nestorius*

We have already alluded to certain new texts whose publication served to re-open the question of Nestorius' heresy. A more accurate interpretation of Nestorius' actual teachings has been made possible because of two especially important documents. The first factor in stirring up a new interest was Loof's edition of the *Nestoriana* (1905). All the fragments previously known and in addition to them about one hundred new fragments found in the Syrian-monophysitic literature were collected and edited in this volume. The second and even more important factor was the discovery (1889) of the Syriac translation of Nestorius' *Bazaar of Heracleides*, edited by Bedjan in 1910, translated into French the same year, and into English in 1925 by Driver and Hodgson. The careful examination of this new material by a number of scholars has not produced a unified interpretation of Nestorius. Scholarly opinion is still divided, but even this division indicates the need for a revision of the traditional interpretation of Nestorius found in text books on church history, history of

doctrine, and systematic theology. It needs to be said here that quite a few scholars seem to approach this problem with an aprioristic hermeneutics. Somehow, they feel, the new textual findings *must* be shown to corroborate the decisions of the ecumenical councils. Nestorius does not actually receive a new hearing; the issue has been definitively settled by conciliar decree. The old notion that church councils cannot err seems to exercise a powerful influence on some scholars, even though the reformers vigorously protested that idea. Be that as it may, we shall here only attempt to analyze and classify the various modern positions taken on Nestorius' doctrinal teachings. We shall survey the debate which has taken place within the past half century by addressing two special topics: the teaching of two persons and the teaching of the personal union.

A. *On the teaching of two persons*

Bethune-Baker's famous Chapter VI in his sensational book, *Nestorius and His Teaching* (1908) is entitled: "Two Persons' Not the Teaching of Nestorius." Less than ten years before he had published another book, *An Introduction to the Early History of Christian Doctrine*, in which he stated the exact opposite thesis, following the traditional opinion that Nestorius taught two persons in Christ. Why did Bethune-Baker reverse his judgment? Because in the meantime he had read the *Bazaar of Heracleides*, and in the light of this new evidence he felt that his judgment had to be altered.

According to Bethune-Baker Nestorius did not teach a doctrine which so distinguishes the Godhead and the manhood of Christ as to treat them as separate personal existences, i.e., as two persons instead of one. To prove his thesis he quotes and interprets a list of expressions and passages from both the earlier and later writings of Nestorius. The most impressive evidence adduced by Bethune-Baker is the position which Nestorius adopted against the Paulinians (the followers of Paul of Samosata). Nestorius says: "They (the Paulinians) speak of a double son and a double Christ, both as to persons and as to substances; and even as the saints received the indwelling and image of God, so they say it is with Christ."<sup>4</sup> This kind of adoptionistic christology is rejected by Nestorius. Bethune-Baker summarized his interpretation of Nestorius by saying that "he did not think of two distinct persons joined together, but of a *single Person* who combined in Himself the two distinct things (substances) Godhead and manhood with their characteristics (natures) complete and intact though united in Him."<sup>5</sup>

Paul Bedjan, a Syrian Catholic scholar, wrote an introduction to the Syriac text of the *Bazaar of Heracleides* which he edited in 1910. Bedjan felt that this book, an apology written by Nestorius in his own defense, clearly indicated that Nestorius held the same heretical teach-

ings till the end of his life for which he had been condemned and exiled earlier. Nestorius continued to teach that there are two distinct persons in Christ, a conclusion exactly opposite of Bethune-Baker's. But Bedjan's conclusion becomes suspect when he admits that Nestorius now repeatedly talks about one person, but he does this only as an emergency invention forced upon him by his adversaries. F. Nau, who translated the Syriac text into French in 1910, registered his agreement with Bedjan's conclusion. He squeezed Nestorius into the rationalistic mould of argument according to which the two-person doctrine is necessarily deduced from the two-nature assertion. Every nature must have its own person; therefore, the two natures of Christ require that he have two persons. No doubt, such a doctrine is consistently Nestorian, but whether Nestorius himself argued in such a naive way is questionable.

Jugie (1912) wrote a comprehensive work on Nestorius<sup>6</sup> in which his avowed purpose was to put an end to all doubts about Nestorius by collecting the clearest testimony in support of the orthodox verdict on Nestorius. That verdict reads that Nestorius taught two persons in Christ. Against orthodoxy Nestorius held that the Word unites himself to a *human person*. This teaching follows, he said, from the Antiochian axiom that every complete nature is a person. Thus the concrete human nature is endowed with personality of a human kind. Jugie took notice of the passages which Bethune-Baker quoted to establish Nestorius' orthodoxy, and very frankly admitted that Nestorius employed the Catholic formula of the *union of two natures in one person*. But these quasi-orthodox statements, Jugie said, do not prove Nestorius' orthodoxy. Rather they prove that either Nestorius used orthodox phraseology to confound his readers, or he used the orthodox terms in an ambiguous sense, meaning something else by them. By this treatment of the matter Nestorius can be judged guilty from any angle, by not saying what he means and by not meaning what he says.

H. M. Relton, who published his doctoral dissertation on the problem of the two natures, wrote an article in the *Church Quarterly Review* (1912) in refutation of Bethune-Baker's thesis that Nestorius was not a "Nestorian."<sup>8</sup> His point was that if we define Nestorianism as a doctrine which distinguishes between the Godhead and the manhood of Jesus Christ so as to treat them as separate personal existences, then Nestorius was a "Nestorian." Relton acknowledged that Nestorius vigorously denied teaching the Paulinian heresy of two Sons, two Christs, and two persons, but his repudiation was merely *verbal*. The *practical* outcome of the logic of his position involved him in the Paulinian heresy. He saw Nestorius as a rash man who in the heat of controversy exaggerated the tendency of the Antiochian

school, and thereby crossed the fine line which differentiates heresy from orthodoxy. In order to avoid an equally heretical confusion of the divine and human natures, Nestorius refrained from speaking of a *real union*. He preferred to speak of a conjunction of two persons in Christ. The real root of Nestorius' trouble was his inability to conceive of "nature" without a *prosopon* corresponding to that nature. Thus the existence of two distinct natures, the divine and the human, led to the conclusion of two *prosopa* conjoined in intimate fashion, whereas orthodoxy demanded the union of two natures in one *prosopon*.

F. Loofs delivered four lectures on Nestorius before the University of London at King's College in 1914, later published in book form.<sup>9</sup> Here we are presented with the now famous thesis that Nestorius is not orthodox, but orthodoxy is unorthodox. Loofs was sympathetic with Bethune-Baker's attempt to exonerate Nestorius, but he took issue with Bethune-Baker's neglect to admit the frequency with which Nestorius spoke of two persons (*prosopa*) in Christ. It is true, he said, that Nestorius could no more imagine a nature without a *prosopon* than he could one without a *hypostasis*. But Nestorius did not mean by *prosopon* what we call person. Not only a rational being has its *prosopon*, but everything has a *prosopon*. The main thing in Nestorius' idea of *prosopon* is the notion of an "external undivided appearance."<sup>10</sup> Every nature or substance has a corresponding form of appearance. Hence, Nestorius must speak of two *prosopa* in Christ. But *prosopon* does not mean "personality" as we moderns understand it. It means not the "internal self" or "centered unity of consciousness," but rather the "external form of appearance" proper to any entity, divine, human, or sub-human. Loof stressed that the mere fact that Nestorius spoke of two *prosopa* in Christ is not sufficient evidence against him. But the fact that he spoke more frequently of one *prosopon*, a fact which Bethune-Baker emphasized, suggests that the term is ambiguous. Therefore, instead of saying with Jugie that Nestorius does not mean what he says when he speaks of one person, Loofs said that Nestorius can use the same term in two different senses. As with so many philosophical terms, there is not always an unambiguously clear meaning for every term. All the trinitarian and christological controversies were complicated by imprecise terminological definitions.

A. C. Headlam answered Loofs' idea that Nestorius was orthodox by earlier standards in an article entitled, "Nestorius and Orthodoxy" (1915).<sup>11</sup> Headlam believed that Nestorius' difficulty was caused by his adherence to the fundamental tenet of the immutability of the Logos. The eternal Logos can no longer be called the "Son" after the incarnation, otherwise there would be two sons, the Son of God and the son of man. But not to call him the Son would mean that

the Logos has ceased to be what he was. But that is impossible, for the Logos is immutable. Therefore, while Nestorius denied verbally that he taught a doctrine of two sons and two persons, implicitly he was forced to affirm it. Headlam's argument hardly seems convincing, however, for by such logical rigmarole, any theologian could be tied up in knots. Furthermore, the doctrine of the immutability of the Logos was no invention of Nestorius, for he shared this idea with the whole antecedent tradition.

Mackintosh (1913), Seeberg (1923), Duchesne (1924), Cave (1925), Hayes (1930), Sellers (1940), Rowe (1945), and Vine (1948)<sup>12</sup> all thought that though Nestorius used the word *prosopon* with reference both to the Godhead and the manhood of Christ, he did not mean thereby two separate and distinct personal existences joined together merely by a bond of love or mutual will. Inferences were drawn by his critics which do not necessarily follow from Nestorius' position, and it is precisely these inferences that characterize the "Nestorianism" for which Nestorius was perhaps unjustifiably condemned. We will examine briefly the arguments of several of these scholars who shed some new light on the question.

Reinhold Seeberg brought out especially Nestorius' belief in the two natures, a point at which he was undoubtedly orthodox. Does the idea of two natures logically entail the belief in two Sons or Christs? No, it merely means that the Logos as God must be strictly distinguished from the humanity, but in such a way that both compositely form one person to be held in dignity and reverence. Since the incarnation the Logos does not act except in union with the man Jesus. Seeberg concluded his brief discussion by saying: "In his (Nestorius') christology there is evidently nothing heterodox."<sup>13</sup>

Louis Duchesne regarded it as a stupendous blunder that Nestorius should be classified along with the Paulinians. There is no good reason why Nestorius' testimony should not be accepted that he did not teach two Sons or two persons in Christ. In fact, the question is still an open one as to what really constitutes the heresy of Nestorius.

Sellers is quite convinced that Nestorius was not "Nestorian," that he did not teach the doctrine of two persons. This is a legitimate conclusion borne out by numerous statements which prove that to Nestorius Jesus Christ was very God incarnate. In the *Bazaar* Nestorius denounced those who regard Christ as one of the saints who received the indwelling of God. Sellers thinks that the whole tenor of the argument in the *Bazaar* should end every effort to associate Nestorius with Paul of Samosata, and should disprove the charge of his teaching two persons in Christ.

Tixeront (1922), Kidd (1922), and Wolfson (1956) all took the opposite view from the above scholars. They said that Nestorius



may be accused not only of holding a two-person doctrine, but also of teaching the Paulinian heresy which regarded Jesus as a mere man. The man Jesus is intimately related to the Logos of God, but that relationship is not essentially different from that which existed between the Logos and the prophets and saints. The traditional interpretation is clearly in the right. Of these views we will examine the recent one by H. A. Wolfson which appears in his book, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers*.

After presenting a well-documented analysis and systematic summary of Nestorius' teachings, Wolfson came to the conclusion that Nestorius was ebionitic, i.e., that logically his position implied that Jesus was a mere man. Cyril's charge that to Nestorius Jesus was not essentially different from Moses, a charge which a great number of modern scholars regard as malicious defamation, was quoted favorably by Wolfson. How did Wolfson arrive at the conclusion that Nestorius was a neo-ebionite?

By analyzing a number of texts Wolfson discovered that Nestorius believed that before the union of the Logos with the man, each was a real person. It may be deduced from other texts that the union of the two persons took place between the conception and the birth. Wolfson is, to my knowledge, the only scholar who has concerned himself with this particular problem. Other texts show that just as the two persons existed before the union in the womb, they also continued to exist as such after the union. It was axiomatic for Nestorius that every nature also has a person. Therefore, just as for the orthodox theologians the two natures maintain their distinctive characteristics intact after the union, so for Nestorius the persons together with their natures continue to exist after the union. The orthodox Fathers, in order to teach one person and two natures, were forced to hold that the human nature did not have its own person, but rather used the person of the Logos. The human nature and divine nature existed after the union, but the one person was in orthodox christology the person of the Logos.

Wolfson attempted to harmonize the texts which speak of two persons with the texts which speak of the one person of Christ. Nestorius' theory was that the two distinctly existing persons combine to make a new person, who is called Jesus. Hence, Jesus is one person made up of two persons. In this way we can account for the occasions when Nestorius speaks of two *prosopa*, without contradicting his reference to the one *prosopon*. Later we shall discuss Wolfson's theory of the relation between these two persons in the one person of Jesus.

Our survey so far demonstrates clearly how divergent is con-

temporary scholarly opinion in regard to the "two-person" issue in Nestorius' christology. Wolfson's interpretation is the very anti-thesis of Bethune-Baker's provocative thesis, with no promise of a synthesis from any of the other scholars we mentioned. A large number of the opinions we have sampled will admit he taught there is a divine *prosopon* and a human *prosopon* in the one person of Christ, but they hasten to add that the term *prosopon* does not denote a "personality" conceived of in modern psychosocial terms. All the interpretations admit that the ultimate issue for Nestorius rests upon his conception of the union of the two *prosopa*. Granted that both the human and divine have each a *prosopon*, Nestorius might still teach that they enter into real personal union. If he does teach this, then he can hardly be accused of teaching two separate persons. In order to safeguard the assertion that Jesus is *vere Deus* and *vere homo*, he may have found it necessary to speak *in abstracto* of two distinct persons, but because of the incarnation, the two persons have entered into a real union *in concreto*. Thus we are brought naturally to this important question: What is Nestorius' teaching on the union of persons.

*B. On the teaching of the personal union*

What Nestorius meant by the phrase, "the One Person of Jesus Christ," determines whether or not he has a theory which adequately preserved the incarnation idea. If two persons are set alongside each other in mere external juxtaposition, then the term, "the one person of Jesus Christ," is artificial, fictional, or figurative with no counterpart in reality. We will now attempt to survey modern scholarly opinion on this problem.

Bethune-Baker says that Nestorius "did not think of two distinct persons joined together, but of a single person who combined in Himself the two distinct things (substances) Godhead and manhood with their characteristics (natures) complete and intact though united in Him."<sup>16</sup> But the question remains: what kind of union was it? To express the relation between the Godhead and the manhood in Christ, Nestorius most frequently used the term "conjunction" (*synapheia*). Bethune-Baker does not think that the translation of *synapheia* by the word conjunction does justice to the term. A closer connection is implied, and might be better rendered as "contact" or "cohesion." It is clear, however, that Nestorius did not use the term *synapheia* in contrast to the orthodox term "union" (*henosis*). For in the *Bazaar* he used the latter term even more frequently than the former. The conjoining of God and man in the incarnation is so close and intimate that Nestorius could say "the manhood is the person of the Godhead, and the Godhead is the person of the manhood." The two persons do not act individually in a separate way; there is not a

co-existence of two persons. Rather, we have the idea of one personality merging completely into the other, so that each is acting through the other. The point of union is however for Nestorius on the level of person, and not on the level of nature, and this is precisely what the orthodox christology called for. Bethune-Baker insists that Nestorius also be interpreted in terms of what he was trying to avoid, *viz.*, an Arian doctrine on the one hand which makes of the Logos a creature, and an Apollinarian doctrine on the other which renders the humanity incomplete. To achieve this he was accustomed to speaking of the "person of the Godhead" and the "person of the manhood," but taken in context, these phrases do not deny a real union of persons.

Bedjan regards Nestorius' denial of the hypostatic union as sufficient grounds for his condemnation. But Bedjan judges Nestorius in terms of orthodox christological categories which were made precise at a later date. Nestorius preferred to speak of a "prosopic union," a union of persons. Bedjan thinks that the union Nestorius had in mind is only a communion of two persons enjoying a relation of mutual give and take. Bedjan's criticisms rest within the traditional mould, and he seems too eager to establish the Catholic position against Nestorius.

Like Bedjan and Nau, Jugie, another Roman Catholic, feels that for the sake of Catholic orthodoxy he must refute the thesis advanced by Bethune-Baker. He says that even the doctrine of the infallibility of the Pope is at stake. If one brick is removed, the whole edifice tumbles to the ground. It is therefore not surprising that he finds that Nestorius' idea of a person union is nominal, unreal and artificial. The person of the Logos and the person of the man Jesus look upon each other *as if* they are united really, but actually the union is merely a moral one, or a voluntary one. This was the heresy of Nestorius, *viz.*, failing to deny Jesus a human *prosopon*.

Relton argues explicitly against Bethune-Baker. Nestorius' idea of the union was not adequate to secure a real union of God and man in the person of Christ according to the orthodox teaching of the *communicatio idiomatum* in the hypostatic union. Relton places the weight of his argument upon Nestorius' use of the term *synapheia*, interpreting it as implying only a close communion of the Logos with a perfect man.

Loofs, we remember, has said that Nestorius spoke more frequently of one *prosopon* in Christ than of two *prosopa*. By the expression, "one *prosopon* in Christ," Nestorius had in mind the one undivided appearance of the historical Jesus. Nestorius rejected the idea of a substantial union. Such a union would result in a confusion of God and man, and yield only a third kind of being. The un-

ion is in the *prosopon* without confusion of natures, essences, or substances. Loofs is not averse to admitting the idea of two *prosopa* making reciprocal use of each other, an idea not sufficiently stressed by Bethune-Baker, and not correctly interpreted by Bedjan, Jugie, and Relton. In the person of Christ, a union of two persons took place so that they exchanged what is each other's. That is to say, the exalted Logos manifests himself in the form of a servant, and the humble man is elevated into the form of God. The union takes place in the interchange of roles, the one making use of the *prosopon* of the other. Hence, the one Jesus Christ embodies in himself, not God alone or man alone, but both God and man. Loofs believes that to desire a different kind of union than one of freewill and love would result in an inferior kind of union. A personal union of reciprocal love is higher spiritually than a substantial or physical union. Nestorius, according to Loofs, may not be orthodox in rejecting a substantial union, but then orthodoxy is unorthodox when judged by the christology of the New Testament and early Church Fathers.

The viewpoints of Mackintosh, Seeberg, Duchesne, Cave, Hayes, Sellers, Hodgson, Rowe, and Vine<sup>16</sup> have much in common. All appreciate the frequent and insistent assertion of Nestorius about the "prosopic union." This assertion was put forth as a genuine effort to conceive of an incarnation which did not issue in a reduction of either the full Godhead or the full humanity. If the *prosopon* is an essential part of man, then to eliminate it is to have a truncated humanity in Christ. So the union had to take place in the *prosopon*, yet in such a way that the *prosopon* of each is preserved while uniting with the other. While admitting that two-persons is the teaching of Nestorius, the terms *prosopon* and *person* are not exactly equivalent. The term *prosopon* has more to do with appearance, while the term *person* has direct reference to the inwardness of selfhood. Hodgson may be taken as representative of all these writers when he says: "We are faced by the fact that there is in Nestorius' terminology no word precisely similar to our 'person.' He shares with all his contemporaries an outlook not yet concerned with the psychological investigation which has produced the problem of the nature of personality as it appears in modern philosophy."<sup>17</sup> It is incautious therefore to translate the word *prosopon* as "person," since we are prone to read modern conceptions into Nestorius' theory.

Hodgson takes a mediating view on the question of the personal union. He finds that Nestorius does hold a metaphysical theory of the union of God and man, and not merely by will or mutual love. Thus he disagrees with Bedjan, Jugie, Relton, as well as Loofs; and he agrees with Bethune-Baker. But Nestorius' metaphysical theory is too weak for an adequate christology.

J. G. Rowe, in his Washburn Prize dissertation, holds a view similar to Bethune-Baker and Hodgson. Nestorius could not accept a hypostatic or physical union for that would violate the fundamental belief in the impassibility of God. The principle of union is to be found in the *prosopa* of the Godhead and manhood; these *prosopa* coalesce so as to form the one person of Christ incarnate. Rowe asserts that when the two *prosopa* coalesce, a unified personality is the result. Hence, Nestorius was not a Nestorian.

Vine (1948) has reconstructed Nestorius' thought in a novel way. He has done this by filling in certain lacunae in Nestorius' arguments so as to reduce it to an ordered system. Terms which Nestorius does not define are defined. Vine thinks it is then possible to read the *Bazaar* from beginning to end without difficulty and with much profit. We will now try to recapitulate briefly a long argument which establishes the meaning of the union.

God the Word, wishing to become man, made use of a potentially separate man as part of His *prosopon* for thirty-three years. He, the Logos, thus had an *allogenuous prosopon*, consisting of Himself and of the potentially separate man as His instrument. "An *allogenuous prosopon* is the self-manifestation of an *ousia* and nature, the said *ousia* and nature making use of other *ousias* and natures for its self-manifestation, so that the *prosopon* is indeed the self-manifestation of that *ousia* and nature, but contains elements not within its *ousia* and nature, of which it is making use by entering into voluntary syntactic union."<sup>18</sup> The term "*allogenuous prosopon*" is the crucial one in Vine's reconstruction. The Logos had an *allogenuous prosopon* which manifested his own nature as well as the human nature. The potentially separate man is taken into his *allogenuous prosopon*. The union is as complete as possible. Words like *love*, *acknowledgment*, and *adoption* express the nature of the union of the Logos with the potentially separate man. During the existence of the potentially separate man, i.e., from the moment of conception until death, the Logos had no *prosopon* other than the *allogenuous prosopon* of which the potentially separate man was part. The Logos limited Himself to the powers and modes of self proper to the potentially separate man. His *prosopon* coincided with the self-expression or appearance of the potentially separate man. Since the human nature had the same *prosopon* as the divine nature, the Logos may truly be said to have experienced human urges and stresses. Thus the one *prosopon* was truly God and truly man. Nestorius discriminated the two natures while stressing the unity of *prosopa*, for God the Word became man by lending his *prosopon* to be that by which the human nature expressed itself. The man Jesus never existed as a separate entity or as a mere man, but

potentially this could have happened if the unity effected at the moment of conception would have been disrupted.

Opposing these interpretations which are more or less similar we have those of Tixeront, Kidd, and Wolfson. Tixeront is appreciative of Nestorius' sincere and frequent insistence upon the unity of the person of Christ, but it finally is of no avail since it cannot achieve a real union. Kidd thinks that Nestorius believes Christ is composed of two beings living side by side in a fellowship of love and moral acquiescence in the will of the other. Wolfson offers a much profounder analysis than either of these. Therefore we will pay close attention to his discussion.

The chief problem in the incarnation idea is how to conceive of the union of two essentially different beings, God and man. In ancient philosophy Wolfson finds five current conceptions of kinds of union of physical things. They are: (1) union of composition; (2) union of mixture in the Aristotelian sense; (3) union of mixture in the Stoic sense; (4) union of confusion; and (5) union of predominance. Physical objects could be united in any of these five ways. The Fathers had these conceptions to draw from in their search for an adequate analogy to explain the union of the Logos with the human element in the incarnation. Nestorius in examining these analogies evidently selected the first type, for the other four were strictly unacceptable to him. This can be deduced from the fact that he employed the term *synapheia* to express the union of incarnation. He did not use the terms "composition" or "juxtaposition" or "continuity," each of which were in current use to describe the first type of union. But the term *synapheia* belongs to the family of words all of which denote the union of two things by "composition" in the sense of "juxtaposition." Contemporaries of Nestorius (e.g., Severus of Antioch) grasped the significance of Nestorius' use of *synapheia*, and therefore accused him of teaching a union in the sense of "juxtaposition." Understood in this way, the inferences were quickly drawn that he taught two persons in Jesus, and two Sons, two Christs, a teaching which for Cyril is tantamount to the denial of the incarnation. But Nestorius asserted repeatedly that he teaches one "person," i.e., a union of persons, and is not guilty of the Paulinian heresy condemned in a previous Council.

Nestorius sought to stress the intimacy of the union of the two persons by teaching that the humanity makes use of the divinity, and the divinity makes use of the humanity. The two persons which unite to make one do not therefore remain distinct as do the two natures. This is the basis for Nestorius' claim that he has not fallen into the Paulinian error. He did not teach two Sons or two Christs because the union of two persons results in one Christ and one Son. As we

have seen, the unity of two persons is according to the analogy of two physical things bound together by "composition" or "juxtaposition."

If Nestorius really did mean to employ the analogy of two physical things held together in a union of "composition" and by implication also "juxtaposition," it would seem impossible for him to escape the inferences which his adversaries drew from this analogy. However, by Wolfson's analysis, if that is correct, Nestorius would point out that the analogy is only applicable when one is describing the relation of the two natures to each other. Therefore, the analogy of two things held together as two boards glued to each other might well be accepted by Nestorius as a description of the way the two natures are juxtaposed. But the analogy is unbecoming with respect to the union of the two persons, for as Dr. Wolfson has shown, "there is a difference between the union of the two persons and the union of the natures."<sup>19</sup> This analogy does not in any way bring out this difference. For "the union of the two persons results in a new person, namely, the person of Jesus, of which the original two persons are component parts, whereas the union of the two natures does not result in a new nature." Of course, Wolfson tries to show that the one person means "one in the sense of what Aristotle calls a 'continuous' one or a 'composite' one, illustrated by the example of 'a bundle made one by a band.'"<sup>20</sup> But this still is inadequate as an analogy for the kind of unity of persons that Nestorius has in mind. For Wolfson recognizes also Nestorius' distinctive idea that the humanity makes use of the person of the divinity and the divinity makes use of the person of the humanity. The fact that Nestorius used this analogy may account for all those heretical ideas attributed to him, but it does not do justice to the fulness of Nestorius' conception even in terms of Wolfson's analysis.

It is regrettable that this exceedingly acute analysis of a difficult doctrine failed to observe this crucial limitation of this analogy. The charge of ebionism is only understandable in the light of this failure, and is at the same time inconsistent with this other phase of Wolfson's analysis which admits the coincidence of the human person with the divine person to form a real personal unity according to Nestorius' teaching. This unity is of an unexampled kind, for of what prophet would Nestorius say that his human person is the divinity, or makes use of the person of the divinity? There is only one incarnation for Nestorius, and Cyril can only say that for Nestorius Jesus is essentially no different from Moses because he has overlooked this aspect of Nestorius' teaching, and has derived it rather as an inference from an analogy which has its limitations like all analogies do.

Nestorius would deny further with good reasons that his doc-

trine of the unity "logically . . . implies that Jesus was a mere man." The name "Jesus" and the humanity are not coterminous or coextensive. The humanity designates the nature-person which is one of the component parts of the person of Jesus. The name "Jesus" comprehends two persons and two natures, the human and divine, but is at the same time regarded as only one person, which is neither the divine person alone (as the orthodox Fathers held) nor the human person alone (as the ebionites held) but is both together because of the unique personal union of the two persons. Wolfson recognizes this fact in one place where he says, "to Nestorius the man in Jesus, too, is both a person and a nature, so that when he speaks of one person in Jesus he means thereby the person of Jesus, which is made up of both the person of the Logos and the person of the man."<sup>21</sup> Wolfson's conclusion that Nestorius' doctrine "logically . . . implies that Jesus was a mere man"<sup>22</sup> therefore does not correspond with the factual data which he has gathered to express systematically the fullness of Nestorius' doctrine. Wolfson's conclusion follows as an inference from the analogy which he believes Nestorius employed, but it is contradicted by other statements of Nestorius' position set forth by Wolfson. The analogy breaks down at a crucial point, as we have observed, and the charge of ebionism can only be made at the expense of neglecting another phase of Nestorius' doctrine.

### III. *Concluding Remarks*

We have come to the end of our survey of Nestorian interpretation. Nestorius has fared ill and well. He has won almost universal sympathy if not universal agreement. Even church theologians who feel bound to the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils, while rejecting Nestorianism, will pour out their hearts in empathy for the heretic who was unjustly treated. Orthodoxy owes a profound debt of gratitude even to the heretics, and modern christologists are especially grateful to the School of Antioch and Nestorius for having fought successfully the fight for the complete humanity of the biblical Christ. It anticipated the final death blow to every kind of docetism and all traces of monophysitism which only in our century has become virtually complete.

Even though Nestorianism as such may be a dead issue, Nestorius' christology continues to provide insights for the modern task of reconstructing a christology compatible with modern thought. Such a reconstruction may choose to avoid completely the Hellenistic conceptual framework common to both the Antiochian and Alexandrian schools of theology, but it can scarcely avoid the perennial christological problems that crop up within every framework. New modes



of thought have arisen since the Enlightenment period which dispense with the problem of uniting the divine and human natures in the one person of Jesus Christ. It is widely thought that we can circumvent the problem which erupted between Nestorius and Cyril by refusing to acknowledge the validity of the way in which they posed the questions to which they sought answers.

It is noteworthy that Karl Barth has caused theologians to have some second thoughts on the advisability of evading the christological issues of the fifth century. A thorough re-evaluation of the old debates on christology will continue to be imperative. First of all, the strictly historical dimensions of the problem remain far from settled. Our survey of modern interpretations shows that no consensus has been reached as to whether Nestorius was a Nestorian, whether he was orthodox, or whether orthodoxy itself was unorthodox, judged by primitive criteria. Secondly, the theological dimensions of the christological problem cannot all be swept under the rug of "hellenism" or "Greek categories."

Whatever the conceptual framework of christological reflection, it seems that several questions which Nestorius posed are unavoidable. (1) What is the relationship between God (the Logos) and the man Jesus, or between divinity and humanity in the historical figure of Jesus, and how is this relationship best expressed? (2) What kind of unity is affected in the life of Jesus between divinity and humanity, and what is the *locus divinitatis* in Jesus? Assuming that divine-human unity is to be maintained, what analogies or philosophical concepts may be found to illustrate the union? It is in wrestling with these questions that modern theology still retains continuity with the christological systems of the fifth century. The history of the interpretation of Nestorius provides evidence of this continuity. It remains for theologians today to take the full measure of the abundance of new historical evidence which historians have turned up.

1. Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book VII, chapter xxxii, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (2nd. series; New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1890), Vol. II.
2. A. von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, trans. Speirs and Miller (London: Williams and Norgate, 1898), IV, 183-86.
3. *Concordia Triglotta*, pp. 823, 18-20.
4. J. F. Bethune-Baker, *Nestorius and His Teaching* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1908), p. 82.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
6. M. Jugie, *Nestorius et la Controverse Nestorienne* (Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne, 1912).
7. N. M. Relton, *A Study in Christology* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1917).
8. N. M. Relton, "Nestorius the Nestorian," *Church Quarterly Review*, LXXIII, No. 146 (January, 1912).
9. F. Loofs, *Nestorius and His Place in the History of Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914).
10. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
11. A. C. Headlam, "Nestorius and Orthodoxy," *Church Quarterly Review*, LXXX, No. 60 (July, 1915).
12. Cf. the bibliography for complete titles and publishing details.
13. R. Seeburg, *History of Doctrines*,

- trans. Charles Hay (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1954), I, 262.
14. Cf. the bibliography for titles and publishing details.
  15. Bethune-Baker, *op. cit.*, p. 88.
  16. Cf. the bibliography for titles and publishing details.
  17. L. Hodgson, "The Metaphysic of Nestorius," in *Nestorius: The Bazaar of Heracleides* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), p. 142.
  18. A. R. Vine, *An Approach to Christology* (London: Independent Press, 1948), p. 104.
  19. H. A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), I, 455.
  20. *Ibid.*
  21. *Ibid.*, p. 450.
  22. *Ibid.*, p. 606.

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