

Study Guide #10

WCF 8: Christ the Mediator

Introduction: Review of Ecumenical Christology

(Note: For the sake of this study on Christ as Mediator, Chalcedonian/Nicean Christology Is Assumed.

The Nicene Creed

Originally adopted in the city of Nicaea by the First Council of Nicaea in 325. In 381, it was amended at the First Council of Constantinople, and the amended form is referred to as the Nicene or the *Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed*.

The churches of Oriental Orthodoxy use this profession of faith with the verbs in the original plural ("we believe") form. The Eastern Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Church use it with the verbs of believing changed to the singular ("I believe") form. The Anglican communion and many Protestant denominations also use it, sometimes with the verbs of believing in the plural form but generally in the singular.

We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made; of the same essence as the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven; he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and was made human. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried. The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead. His kingdom will never end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life. He proceeds from the Father and the Son, and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified. He spoke through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church. We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look forward to the resurrection of the dead, and to life in the world to come. Amen

Calcedonian Creed (451 AD)

A Further clarification of two natures-- The 4th Ecumenical Council of Calcydon and the Calcydonian Creed
The 5th century controversy in Christology was focused on the meaning of Christ's incarnation in relation to his person. The questions were: To what extent was Christ human? And to what extent was Christ divine? The protagonists involved Bishop Nestorius of Constantinople and Bishop Cyril of Alexandria representing the East and West respectively. The former stressed two natures to preserve Christ's humanity. The later stressed one nature to preserve Christ's divinity. And yet both conceded the absolute necessity of preserving a *dialectical understanding of the relationship of the human and divine in Christology*.

It was all charged within the political context surrounding whether to venerate Mary as the "mother of God"(Cyril), or not (Nestorius). As history tells it, the differences in Christology were no doubt accelerated by political expediency. The debate moved between what was most likely competing semantics per vernacular "forms" to competing

theological positions per theological “elements.” Accordingly, historian Ben Green makes the observation how “the challenge for understanding the debate between Nestorius and Cyril is to distinguish the moderate from the extreme. Each of these theologians can be seen to represent *either* the moderate or the extreme position of his school of thought.”¹

Eventually by means of a convergence in theologizing and politicizing, and after involving a whole host of subsequent personalities (The Antiochene “school” per Eutyches on the east side and the Alexandrian school per Dioscorus on the west side for instance), the council of Ephesus in 431 decided in favor of the Cyril-Alexandrian school and against what was by then a more eccentric expression of the Antiochene position than was previously held by Nestorius himself. Again as noted by Ben Green, “in deciding in Cyril's favor, Ephesus did not, however, fully adopt Cyril's Christology.” Likewise, “Nestorius' overall delivery of the Antiochene Christology was much more orthodox. He was firmly convinced of the union of the divine and human natures in the single Son, Christ: “I did not say that the Son was one (person) and God the Word another; I said that God *the Word* was by nature one and the *temple* by nature another, one Son by conjunction.”² Eventually, Ephesus was not able to come to a resolution concerning Christology itself, as it was more a decision concerning the praxis issue of veneration. And even then, Cyril was later deposed as well by the Eastern bishops before the council was formerly closed in AD 433.

However much Ephesus settled the issue politically, it took Chalcedon in AD 451 to finally clarify the Christological doctrine itself as would eventually become widely accepted in the Greek, Roman and Protestant traditions. The Chalcedon creed reflected more of a “win-win” compromise between the original Nestorian and Cyril positions. To begin, as per a unified confession, Chalcedon first stipulated how “we unanimously teach to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man... the same *one in being (homoousios)* with the Father as to the divinity and one in being with us as to the humanity.” In so far as Christ's being is two *natures (ousia)*, they are forever being in *union (homo)*, the divine in perfect union with the human as then to establish Christ's communal essence.

The council would further clarify, “that one and the same Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son, must be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion or change, without division or separation.”³ Herein the famous “two distinct but not separate” concept is codified. That is, “the distinction between the natures was never abolished by their union but rather the character proper to each of the two natures was preserved as they came together in one person (*prosōpon*) and one hypostasis.” Here again, the distinctly human and *divine* remain fixed in one *static* essence, albeit in an ongoing living communion as one person in communion, “the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the communion.” This then was the Chalcedonian confession of what materialized historically in the incarnation of Christ wherein it was said; “the same was begotten from the Father before the ages as to the divinity and in the latter days for us and our salvation was born as to his humanity from Mary the Virgin Mother of God.”⁴

We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body; consubstantial [co-essential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord

1 Ben Green, *Nestorius and Cyril: 5th Century Christological Division and Recent Progress* (Reconciliation Press, 1975) p. 454.

2 Green.. Quote taken from a sermon Nestorius preached in 430 as quoted by Aloys Grillmeier, S.J., *Christ in Christian Tradition*, Vol.

1: *From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, 2nd revised edition, trans. John Bowden (Atlanta: John Knox

3 Green, p. 455

4 Green, p. 457

Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning Him, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.

And so there we have it: ecumenical Christology later confessed by all three of the major branches of Christendom—Eastern Catholic, Western Catholic and generally speaking Protestant (note “mother of God”??)

c.f. # 4 “Doctrine of God and Holy Trinity”)

WCF 2:3. In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost: the Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.

1. What do you think Newbigin means by the “universality” of Christ?

What I am pleading for is simple, but not, I hope, simplistic. It is simply for a recovery of confidence in the gospel, the truth, sufficiency, finality and universality of that which God has done for the whole human race in Jesus Christ. We cannot accept for him a place merely as one of the world's religious teachers. We are but learners and have to listen not only to our fellow Christians of other cultures, but also to our neighbors of other faiths, who may teach us much that we have not understood. But the crucial question is: Which is the real story? To that question our whole life is our answer. There is no neutrality. The answer has to be given not only in the words of the Church, but in a life which follows the way Christ went, and so - in Paul's words - bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, manifests to the world his risen life, the life which is life indeed.⁵

2. Why do we believe in Christ's Universality? What about his person and Work make it so?

For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and people, Christ Jesus, himself human who gave himself a ransom for all-- this was attested at the right time. 1 Tim.2:5-7

Read WCF 8:1-2.

1. It pleased God, in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, his only begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man, the Prophet, Priest, and King, the Head and Savior of his church, the Heir of all things, and Judge of the world: unto whom he did from all eternity give a people, to be his seed, and to be by him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.

2. The Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties, and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb

⁵ J.E. Lesslie Newbigin, *Witnesses to the World* 1987.

of the virgin Mary, of her substance. So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God, and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man.

3. What does it mean that Christ is described as our mediator.

A. A. Hodge: "As it respects God, it is absolutely necessary, in order to reconciliation, that the Mediator should propitiate the just displeasure of God by expiating the guilt of sin, and that he should supplicate in our behalf, and that he should actually introduce our persons and services to the acceptance of the Father. As it respects men, it is absolutely necessary that the Mediator should reveal to them the truth concerning God and their relations to him, and the conditions of acceptable service; that he should persuade and enable them to receive and obey the truth so revealed; and that he should so direct and sustain them, and so control all the outward influences to which they are subjected, that their deliverance from sin and from the powers of an evil world shall be perfected."

4. Notice how the confession treats Christology. What is the relationship between the "person" and "work" of Christ. See then how section 1 relates to section 2.

5. Why then does the "person" of Christ lead the confession to acknowledge the exclusive claims that Christ is "the only Mediator between God and man."

6. How does Christ execute the office of Mediator? What "offices" does he satisfy in order to reconcile humanity to God? C.f .Westminster Shorter Catechism

Question 43

Q How doth Christ execute the office of a prophet?

A Christ executeth the office of a prophet, in his revealing to the church, in all ages, by his Spirit and Word, in divers ways of administration, the whole will of God, in all things concerning their edification and salvation.

Question 44

Q How doth Christ execute the office of a priest?

A Christ executeth the office of a priest, in his
once offering himself a sacrifice without spot to God, to be a reconciliation for the
sins of his people;
and in making continual intercession for them.

Question 45

Q How doth Christ execute the office of a king?

A Christ executeth the office of a king,
in calling out of the world a people to himself,
and giving them officers, laws, and censures, by which he visibly governs them;
in bestowing saving grace upon his elect,
rewarding their obedience, and correcting them for their sins,
preserving and supporting them under all their temptations and sufferings,
restraining and overcoming all their enemies,
and powerfully ordering all things for his own glory, and their good;
and also in taking vengeance on the rest, who know not God, and obey not the
gospel.

Read 8: 3-4.

3. The Lord Jesus, in his human nature thus united to the divine, was sanctified, and anointed with the Holy Spirit, above measure, having in him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; in whom it pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell; to the end that, being holy, harmless, undefiled, and full of grace and truth, he might be thoroughly furnished to execute the office of a mediator, and surety. Which office he took not unto himself, but was thereunto called by his Father, who put all power and judgment into his hand, and gave him commandment to execute the same.

4. This office the Lord Jesus did most willingly undertake; which that he might discharge, he was made under the law, and did perfectly fulfill it; endured most grievous torments immediately in his soul, and most painful sufferings in his body; was crucified, and died, was buried, and remained under the power of death, yet saw no corruption. On the third day he arose from the dead, with the same body in which he suffered, with which also he ascended into heaven, and there sitteth at the right hand of his Father, making intercession, and shall return, to judge men and angels, at the end of the world.

7. Note that the various perfections of Christ are part of his equipment for his mediatorial task; as the Assembly says, “to the end, that...him might be thoroughly furnished to execute the office of a Mediator and Surety.” Note how many of the biblical texts substantiate this:

Heb. 7:26 For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens;

Acts 10:37 “that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: 38 “how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

Heb. 7:22 by so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant. 23 Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. 24 But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood.

8. Note also that, despite his perfections, Christ did not take his Mediatorship upon himself, but was called to it.

Heb. 5:4 And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was.

Matt. 28:18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

Eph.1:4, "even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world...

"The business of man's salvation was transacted upon covenant terms between the Father and the Son from all eternity... What grace was that which was given us in Christ before the world began, but this grace of redemption which was from everlasting thus contrived and designed for us, in that way which hath been here opened? " (John Flavel, p.61)

Read 8:5-8.

5. The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience, and sacrifice of himself, which he, through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of his Father; and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto him.

6. Although the work of redemption was not actually wrought by Christ till after his incarnation, yet the virtue, efficacy, and benefits thereof were communicated unto the elect, in all ages successively from the beginning of the world, in and by those promises, types, and sacrifices, wherein he was revealed, and signified to be the seed of the woman which should bruise the serpent's head; and the Lamb slain from the beginning of the world; being yesterday and today the same, and forever.

7. Christ, in the work of mediation, acts according to both natures, by each nature doing that which is proper to itself; yet, by reason of the unity of the person, that which is proper to one nature is sometimes in Scripture attributed to the person denominated by the other nature.

8. To all those for whom Christ hath purchased redemption, he doth certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same; making intercession for them, and revealing unto them, in and by the Word, the mysteries of salvation; effectually persuading them by his Spirit to believe and obey, and governing their hearts by his Word and Spirit; overcoming all their enemies by his almighty power and wisdom, in such manner, and ways, as are most consonant to his wonderful and unsearchable dispensation.

9. The Assembly observes that Jesus "hath fully satisfied the justice of his Father". This can only be done through substitution. So Romans 5:19: "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous."

10. Therefore, the confession uses Biblical language when saying that Christ was "made under the law." (section 4, Gal.4:4) What does this mean?

We who are rightly born under the law are now justified NOT "by works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ." (Gal.2:16) This is because Christ, who is not rightly born under the law was for our sake born under the law and in submission to its terms of contract that he for us he IS justified by the works of the law. This then is the meaning of Paul's proclamation, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me"-- that our status as a "life" with God is based on Christ's status as under the law before God. Again, this is the meaning of Paul's exclaim, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us." (Gal.3:13)

11. What is the present global and cultural context for us talking about the universality of Christ? How should we respond? Is there a way to both embrace pluralism and the need for mutually beneficial dialogue with people of other religions, while at the same time affirming the universality of Christ and the claim, "*I am the way the truth and life, no man comes to the father except by me.*" [note common and special revelation]

As Nietzsche foresaw, the operation of Descartes' "critical principle" which has dominated the "modern" era, has by logical necessity destroyed itself and removed the possibility of certain knowledge. The "post-modernists" have been those who have most explicitly drawn this conclusion, but the belief that ultimate truth is unknowable, and that everyone is entitled to an opinion, has become one of the unquestioned assumptions of our culture. It is, of course, a self-contradictory belief, since one cannot assert that ultimate reality is unknowable without knowing what ultimate reality is. But this belief is overwhelmingly pervasive, and because the Church has lived so long in a cozy domestication with the "modern" worldview, it is inevitable that the same assumption seeps into the life of the Church. "Tolerance" becomes the supreme virtue and "doctrine" becomes a slightly suspect word.⁶

⁶ J.E. Lesslie Newbigin, *Pluralism in the Church* (1993)