ONE HOLY CATHOLIC\textsuperscript{1} APOSTOLIC CHURCH

There is only one Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:1). There is only one gospel (Galatians 1:7). There is only one church in Christ in God (Ephesians 4:4-5), in the Holy Spirit.

Christians in the turbulent battle of human history, culture, nations and egos must continually rediscover, recover, renew, reform and re-express this fact—our union\textsuperscript{2} in one body—the crucified and resurrected Jesus Christ. This turning point is a great example of this body-oneness, amidst social, political, theological—and language—difficulties.

THE GOSPEL—AND FALSEHOOD

The truth of the gospel is always being contested (Ephesians 6:12). The reasoning of redeemed human beings, even Christian pillars (cf. Peter, Galatians 2:11), can quickly turn away from the gospel. Teaching needs to be tested (1John 4:1). Christian Theology in discussion with others is a crucial service to the whole church. The church has a unique role and an indispensable task to serve the creation, in and by our proclamation of the gospel. No one else can do this. Therefore, it will always be important to proclaim Jesus Christ with as much accuracy as possible. The questions asked by humanity, matter: Who is Jesus Christ is in relation to God, in relation to the human race\textsuperscript{3}, and what has he done, and what will he yet do—for humanity, for creation, and for God’s glory?

Scholars, like C.H. Dodd, have searched the speeches in Acts—and have tried to locate, isolate, identify and summarise—the essential points of the gospel proclaimed by the apostles (kerygma). There is certainly a body of teaching, which Paul called the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). Even so, there is no completely comprehensive summary of the gospel to be found in the New Testament (even Romans needs Revelation, and the Gospels), of which one can say: “there it is!”

Why might this be so? Possibly because God has given such a gospel, which must be heard from Christ himself—no one ever heard the gospel from the lips of a man (said Karl Barth). Rational assent to three bible points, followed by a decision, cannot—of itself—initiate an encounter with Jesus. Rather, in proclamation it is the Living Jesus Christ himself who preaches (Romans 10:17) with immediacy, comes to us, and reveals, convicts and convinces, through his Spirit (John 16:8; 1 Corinthians 2:10).

\textsuperscript{1}The term ‘Catholic’ means ‘Universal’. It should not be confused with ‘Roman Catholic’.
\textsuperscript{2}John 13:35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”
\textsuperscript{3}We could add: Who is Jesus, in relation to Israel and in relationship with the Nations of the world?
Controversy and Clarification—Of Great Significance

The church-shaping events, which preceded the momentous turning point at the Council of Chalcedon, in 451, are complex, but are connected with the events of 325 at Nicaea. Its outcome is …well, is in some ways similar to Nicaea: the biblical teaching in the gospel, concerning the Person and Work of Christ is clarified in a most helpful way.

Having refuted the error or Arius in 325 AD, and confessing this truth in the creedal statement that the Word is True God from True God, eternally begotten not made, of one being with the Father, the question soon arose concerning how it can be, that this full Divinity of Jesus Christ could co-exist with his humanity. Was he two Persons - one divine, the other human coexisting within one body? Did the soul, which came to earth from heaven, unite with human flesh from earth, so that Jesus was a combination of divinity and humanity?

Many responses by leading theologians to these questions were inadequate attempts, and as such, were refuted by counter-arguments, which also lacked clarity, truth or accuracy.

The West (Antioch) used Latin; emphasised humanity; and justification. (cf. Rome, too) The East (Alexandria & Constantinople) used Greek; emphasised divinity; and theosis.

On May 23, 451 the Eastern Roman emperor, Marcian summoned a council of about 520 bishops—2 from North Africa (Alexandrian region), and 2 from Pope Leo I in Rome (both of these, having lots of influence and clout)—and the other 516 or so from the Eastern section of the Roman Empire. The conclusion of the Council—which has stood the test of time—was that Jesus was “one person” consisting of “two natures”.

The Definition of the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D)

Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the fathers has handed down to us.4

4 No one ever thought that Jesus was not a human being during his life. But speculation was now arising.  
5 www.reformed.org/documents/chalcedon.html
A BRIEF SKETCH OF EVENTS PRIOR TO CHALCEDON

Athanasius (325): described well that the Logos (Word) took on a human body.

Apollinaris of Laodicea: overly defended the divinity of Jesus, by picturing Jesus as a combination of divine soul and human body—“one nature” made up of flesh and divine intelligence. (Alexandrian)

Theodore of Mopuestia: (Antioch) refuted this, saying: “two natures”; debates erupted!

Nestorius (Antioch) upheld Theodore’s “two natures”, and was named Bishop of Constantinople (428).

Note: He denied theotokos (bearer/Mother of God) but rather proposed Christotokos (mother of Christ). Gospel was expanding into pagan goddess areas so the theology regarding Mary gained undue prominence.

Cyril (Alexandria) opposed Nestorius as having a schizophrenic Jesus, with 2 persons in 1, but hardly relating.

Note: Competing for controlling influence over Constantinople, where the Roman emperor resided. Cyril called for a Council in 431. Emperor Theodosius took Cyril’s side, and banished Nestorius.

Note: After Capital of empire moved from Rome to Constantinople, the Bishop (‘Pope’) of Rome and of Constantinople competed for prominence.

Eutyches (Alexandrian theology), and a monk in Constantinople affirmed the position of “one nature after the union”.

Flavian Archbishop of Constantinople accused Eutyches of confounding Christ’s two natures, and banished him. But Eutyches appealed his case to Alexandria and Rome.

Dioscorus (Cyril’s nephew) (Alexandria) Arranged to depose Flavian, appealing to Rome.

Leo I “The Great” (Rome) This bishop, serious and dedicated (Pope), had a big reputation in Rome. He advanced the argument about the Bishop of Rome being the successor of Peter. (He later took the lead negotiating with Attila the Hun in 451, and easing the destruction when the Vandals over-ran Rome in 452). He wrote a Tome to Flavian and walked a theological tightrope in his careful wording. ‘Although Dioscorus refused Leo’s Tome when it arrived, it did indeed become the keystone for Chalcedon.

EVENT: Emperor Theodosius II, who was a strong supporter of Alexandrian Christology, was thrown from his horse and killed on July 28th, 450. The now deceased Theodosius had a sister, Pulcheria, who was an ally of Leo, and a supporter of the Antioch position of “two natures”. She chose Marcian as the new emperor. Her opinions tipped the balance against Dioscorus when he called for the Fourth Council to take place in Chalcedon. Leo’s Tome influenced greatly the outcome.

FALL-OUT FROM CHALCEDON

The Alexandrian Church resisted and fought. The Nestorian (Monophysite) Christology that Jesus had only one [Greek monos] nature [Greek physis] became official dogma in the Egyptian church. To this day the Coptic Church of Egypt retains a Monophysite Christology. Christianity was weakened in this area of North Africa, and this, in part, prepared the way for Islam to sweep out of Arabia and across the region in the mid-seventh century. Further, we shall later note the Great Schism of 1054, when the centres of Rome (West) and Constantinople (East) parted ways—the seeds many believe, lying in here in the politics that was involved in Chalcedon.

Nestorians continued to preach and teach, and their influence carried into the future, for one thousand years. Also Jacobus Baradaeus organised the Monophysites into an underground parallel church that became known as the Jacobites. Philip Jenkins, in The Lost History of Christianity, with the subtitle The Thousand Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa and Asia, details the movement of these believers, the Jacobites and the Nestorians. He considers them to be Christian mainstream and not ‘fringe sects’, and sets out a remarkable story of their great expansion into places such Ethiopia and China. He sets the stage noting:

By the time of the Arab conquests in the seventh century, the Jacobites probably held the loyalty of most Christians in greater Syria, while the Nestorians dominated the eastern lands, in what we now call Iraq and Iran. The West Syrian church was Jacobite; East Syrians were Nestorian.

Let us grasp this: once the formulation had been agreed upon, the church could move on together, albeit still grappling with many differences and power plays across the empire. Even so, those who took the gospel to new lands and people’s had a benchmark on this issue from which to give understanding to others, as the need arose. Mark Noll gives an excellent summary of the achievements of Chalcedon:

Chalcedon was a threefold triumph: a triumph of sound doctrine over error in the church, a triumph of Christian catholicity over cultural fragmentation, and a triumph of discriminating theological reasoning over the anti-intellectual dismissal of philosophy, on the one hand, and over a theological capitulation to philosophy, on the other.

Chalcedon—Signpost and Fence

The basic work of Chalcedon has endured the centuries, but not without criticism. In our day, N.T. Wright sees weakness in the definition. In a helpful summary for a global readership on Christology, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen describes Chalcedon as a signpost pointing in the right direction, and a fence separating orthodoxy and heresy.

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7 In Xian, in China, I visited a library of thick metal books, where the teaching of Nestorian Christians found a welcome. Dates like 635 AD are mentioned as when the Scriptures arrived.
8 Philip Jenkins, The Lost History of Christianity, Lion, 2008.
10 http://nearemmaus.com/2011/06/28/n-t-wright-on-the-chalcedonian-definition/
11 Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, Christology, Baker, 2003, p. 78