† Blessed is our God always, as it is now, was in the beginning, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. ... in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Through the prayers of our holy Ancestors, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us and save us. Amen. Glory to You, our God, glory to You.

O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, You are everywhere and fill all things, Treasury of blessings, and Giver of life: come and abide in us, and cleanse us from every impurity, and save our souls, O Good One.

† Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us (three times).

† Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it is now, was in the beginning, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Discord 4

*Fifth Century*

Miaphysitism

“πνεῦμα ὁ θεός, καὶ τοὺς προσκυνοῦντας αὐτὸν ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ δεῖ προσκυνεῖν.”

“God is Spirit: and those who worship Him, in spirit and in truth must worship.” — John 4:24

Miaphysitism (not to be confused with the heresy Monophysitism)[[1]](#endnote-1) is the prevalent viewpoint of the so-called Oriental Orthodox churches today; nevertheless, the term non-Chalcedonian is much to be preferred as it paints a less biased and much clearer picture of the facts of the case. Miaphysitism expresses a distinction with the wording of Dyophysitism, which would prevail at Chalcedon. Both wordings sought to avoid and correct the errors of Nestorianism (that the Divine and human are two separate persons[[2]](#endnote-2)) and Eutychianism (that the Divine and human are so merged as to become one person, the human nature being completely absorbed by the Divine[[3]](#endnote-3)).

Miaphysite wording: ‘Christ is one person “out of two natures”[[4]](#endnote-4), divinity and humanity are united in one nature; the two being united without separation, without confusion, without alteration.’ This view found its source in Alexandria.[[5]](#endnote-5)

Dyophysite wording: ‘Christ is one person “in two natures”, but emphasizes that the natures are “without confusion, without change, without division, without separation”. This view found its source in Antioch.[[6]](#endnote-6)

Monophysite wording: Christ is one person in one nature: the divine person wholly absorbing and transforming the human, so that, except for outward appearance the human ceases to exist. “Christ has only one, divine nature.”[[7]](#endnote-7)

None of these summary descriptions of statement is very clear; nor do they show us how to resolve the difficulty. The debate hinges on the difference of force between the masculine and feminine nuances of the Greek word, One[[8]](#endnote-8). It found its roots in the conflict over Nestorius. We greatly appreciate the sensitivity of John Meyendorff in suggesting that both Dyophysite and Miaphysite expressions are necessary for a balanced grasp or partial understanding of the mystery, which “attempts to express the inexpressible.”[[9]](#endnote-9) We observe that persecution arising from without the Church was now in-part becoming persecution within the Church; however, Jews continued to persecute Christians, and vice versa, throughout the fifth century and beyond.[[10]](#endnote-10)

As we consider the differences in wording between the Miaphysite and Dyophysite stances it is difficult to pick out true differences. Unfortunately, we have not yet considered this wording in its original languages. There seem to be significant dialect differences between the use of Greek in Alexandria and the use of Greek in Antioch, Constantinople, and elsewhere. The thought that others had to observe these distinctions in Syriac, Assyrian, and other languages boggles the mind: English is simply not up to the task.

The slight difference in emphasis between nature (Miaphysite) and person (Dyophysite) seems to us to stem from a preference for one synonym over another, which might be used interchangeably in other contexts: there is not much difference between ὑπόστασις and οὐσία. Both views hold a uniting of natures. Both views reject any idea of division, or separation. Both views emphasize that the two natures are not altered, changed or confused.

We might easily believe that both translations (views) came from the same original, had not so much strife ensued. It is this strife upon which we wish to focus and clarify.

Ephesus Ⅰ (431)[[11]](#endnote-11), the third ecumenical council, where Nestorius was condemned and Cyril of Alexandria (376-444)[[12]](#endnote-12) was supported. The Church of the East[[13]](#endnote-13), mainly the Persian Empire of the Sassanids[[14]](#endnote-14), separated and were branded Nestorians.

* The Council condemned Nestorius before the Antioch delegation arrived.
* John of Antioch’s rival council condemned Cyril (June 22).
* Pope Celestine’s letter(s) condemned Nestorius (July 10).
* The condemnation of Nestorius was ratified in a third session (July 11).
* A fourth session protested John of Antioch’s rival council (July 16).
* A fifth session excommunicated John of Antioch (July 17).
* A sixth session condemned any departure from Nicaea Ⅰ (July 22).
* A seventh session, again condemning Nestorius, dealt with other matters. Dissidents were excommunicated (July 31).

In the aftermath, the Emperor deposed Cyril, Memnon, and John; Cyril, and Memnon were confined. Nevertheless, Cyril was ultimately vindicated, and Nestorius resigned. Miaphysitism was embraced. The Church was rent. Bitterness lingered. A measure of reconciliation was attained, only with much compromise, by, *Common Christological Declaration Between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East* (1994).[[15]](#endnote-15) In the final analysis Ephesus Ⅰ seems to have more in common with a brawl, than with a Church council: there remains ample evidence of political maneuvering, and the sort of overweening pride that has no place in the Church. Cyril of Alexandria[[16]](#endnote-16) may have won the battle; but he lost the war: when the smoke clears away, years later, the Church will be rent in four major warring factions: here we saw the departure of The Church of the East: the departure of the Oriental Orthodox, and the Eastern Orthodox are yet to come.

Ephesus Ⅱ (449)[[17]](#endnote-17), the “Robber Council”. If conduct at Ephesus Ⅰ was reprehensible; Ephesus Ⅱ was even worse. Miaphysitism was retained: so, Cyril of Alexander (376-444), even though dead retained the upper hand. Still, Ephesus Ⅱ seems to mark a turning point.

* Several leaders were associated with Nestorius and deposed: including Theodoret and Domnus.
* Eutyches was temporarily absolved (?).[[18]](#endnote-18)
* Dioscorus of Alexandria, the council president struck Flavian, contrived to manipulate the council by mob rule, and created the situation in which Flavian was beaten.
* Flavian was disgraced, condemned (?), and beaten to death.

It is difficult for us to understand the behavior of Dioscorus as anything less than murder; this we cannot approve: it is not Christian behavior. Ephesus Ⅱ appears to be an attempt to enforce the theology of Cyril of Alexandria on the whole Church on earth with an iron fist, and the shrewd employment of mob rule: it cannot be condoned. If we are to accept the principle of Apostolic Succession; we must now ask ourselves, “Where is it?”: for, this behavior in no way resembles that of the Apostles, or of Christ. The principal leaders here are not servants; but, rather, demagogues and despots… bullies and cruel men, who would rather retain temporal power than follow or love God, and His creation. The fall from Nicaea is astonishing.

Council of Chalcedon (451)[[19]](#endnote-19), the fourth ecumenical council, “Chalcedon the Ominous”, where a power shift is taking place away from Alexandria toward Constantinople and Rome, with Constantinople in control; but, with Rome steadily gaining ascendancy: even though Rome has the ancient Apostolic seat, the shift of the Empire’s capital to Constantinople has drained power and prestige: Rome is left in a temporary influence vacuum.

* Chalcedon was convened to set aside Ephesus Ⅱ.
* Christ subsists in two natures and one hypostases.
* Constantinople has the same patriarchal status as Rome.
* Miaphysitism is set aside in favor of Dyophysitism, even though the wording could be construed as being virtually identical. Emotions ran away with the decision, rather than rationality.
* Both The Church of the East, at one extreme; and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, at the opposite extreme, were rent from the Universal Church in its earthly expression.

Even though the Roman Catholic Churches, the Eastern Orthodox churches, Anglicans, and most Protestants consider Chalcedon to be authoritative: we cannot and do not agree with this conclusion. A dogma emerged supreme; while the body of Christ was rent. That our position is the correct one, is supported by the fact that Rome has found a way to reconcile with The Church of the East; while attempts to reconcile with the Oriental Orthodox are ongoing, as evidenced from the Meyendorff[[20]](#endnote-20) compromise, referenced earlier in the Miaphysitism discussion. Hence, we can only view Chalcedon as a great tragedy; it cannot in any way be considered a victory: since everyone is scrambling to undo Chalcedon it cannot be right, even if it is correct.

If this seems confusing to you, you are not alone. Nothing about these processes speaks of clarity or rationality. Everything smacks of anti-Christian one-upmanship, lacking any of the humility which we must have in Christ. How can anyone possibly believe that this is representative of the Apostleship of the Church.

The article on the Relics of Nestorianism helps our historic understanding.[[21]](#endnote-21) John’s and Cyril’s differences were resolved in 433[[22]](#endnote-22); with Theodoret assenting in the following year. If this resolution worked as well as it appears on the surface; then, The Church of the East should have been able to reconcile, rather than separate.

The following article on the Eutychian controversy gives us further perspective.[[23]](#endnote-23) The subtle variations from Cyril, as they were taught by Eutyches, may explain why, Eutyches seemed at first accepted, and later rejected: perhaps Eutyches lacked theological skill. So, Eutyches was denounced by Eusebius of Dorylaeum (circa 420)[[24]](#endnote-24) in 448; Flavian, forced against his will, condemned him; Eutyches repented and confessed; was reinstated by Dioscorus; exonerated at Ephesus in 449.

By now, Pope Leo and Cyril seem to be clashing over Cyril’s third anathema; but, this was determined to be an issue of wording, not of doctrine. Even though thirteen Egyptian bishops took exception: both Leo and Cyril were seen as orthodox.

Nevertheless, Dioscorus proclaimed Cyril’s *Twelve Anathemas*[[25]](#endnote-25) to be orthodox after Cyril’s death (as opposed to Leo). The refusal to read Leo’s *Tome* was insulting. The threat of East-West schism now loomed large, and Ephesus Ⅱ became the precursor of the Great Schism of 1054. There was no real escape at Chalcedon: The Church of the East was already lost; confirmation of Dyophysitism would alienate Egypt; confirmation of Miaphysitism would alienate Rome: Constantinople and Rome now seem destined to clash. The subtlety of evaluating Leo’s *Tome* by Cyril’s *Twelve Anathemas* sets the stage for the ensuing events.[[26]](#endnote-26)

Unfortunately, Chalcedon “led to the martyrdom, persecution and death of thousands of Egyptian saints and bishops [under Justinian] till the Arab Conquest of Egypt”; thus prompting the title “Chalcedon the Ominous”. What a tragedy! What a travesty! The Church has now resorted to the persecution and martyrdom of its own members. This cannot be: it is, wrong.

*A Solution*

We have come to believe that an approach to the problem from the perspective of Greek lexicography provides the (fairly obvious) solution. Of course, Cyril was correct.

Just as the world of forms and the world of physis (φύσις, physicality)[[27]](#endnote-27) do not mix in the Greek mindset, they are distinct worlds or realms; even so, the spirit world and the physical world are distinct in the Hebrew mindset, even though they mingle. The difference between the Greek and Hebrew mindsets is that the Greek describes impersonal perfections, whereas the Hebrew considers a locus of living spirit beings. In the Hebrew idea God is not confined to either universe: but, is the Creator of both, dwelling completely at every point[[28]](#endnote-28) inside and outside of both.

“πνεῦμα ὁ θεός, καὶ τοὺς προσκυνοῦντας αὐτὸν ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ δεῖ προσκυνεῖν.”

“God is Spirit: and those who worship Him, in spirit and in truth must worship.” — John 4:24

God is Spirit. God is not physis (φύσις) and cannot change to become physis (φύσις). It is ludicrous, even blasphemous, to describe that which is ousia (οὐσία) or hypostasis (ὑπόστασις) as physis (φύσις). At most, God can distinctly add physis (φύσις) to one of the hypostasis (ὑπόστασις): namely, that of the Son; the addition becomes inseparable, yet distinct, and unmixed, without changing either.

* God is Spirit. πνεῦμα ὁ θεός.
* The Son is God is Spirit.
* The Word of God is Spirit.

This Word of God, added to Himself a complete and perfect human nature in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

Some of us want to say that the divine physis (φύσις) added to Himself a complete and perfect human physis (φύσις), and is therefore Dyophysite in nature: but, that is exactly what we cannot and must not say: for, it ascribes physicality to that which is, by nature, Spirit (πνεῦμα).

What we should rather have said is that the Son, Himself a divine Spirit (πνεῦμα) added to Himself a complete and perfect human physis (φύσις), and is therefore Miaphysite or Monophysite in nature. In Christ Mono-πνεῦμα adds to Himself Monophysis. The distinction between mono and mia is unnecessary. Dyophysitism has always been incorrect.

Surely the Greeks of Byzantium understood this distinction in their own language. Why did they agree to what was an obvious blunder of theology?

How did the Latinized twisting of Greek nuances come to dominate in the form of Dyophysitism? Well, it seems as if Pope Leo said it: it’s hard to tell a pope that he’s wrong, that he blundered, or at least that he was mistaken: but mistaken he surely was.

What are we to do? It seems to us that the following are in order:

* We need to express our deep gratitude to the Oriental Orthodox Churches for clinging to the truth down through the ages.
* We need to confess our sin of error, begging for the absolution, forgiveness, and restoration to full fellowship with the Oriental Orthodox Churches.
* We need to abandon all Dyophysite dogma and doctrine, as well as vacate all Church Councils associated with Dyophysite rulings, especially Chalcedon.
* We need to extend amnesty toward both the living and the dead; especially toward those who unjustly suffered condemnation under both sides of these many conflicts.
* Shall Pope Leo be declared anti-pope and excommunicated because of his participation and errors in these highly-politicized conflicts? No, we must forgive him and all others.

“Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority is given to me in heaven and in earth. Therefore, while you are going about, make disciples all nations: baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatever I have commanded you: and, see, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.’ ” — Matthew 28:18-20

Jesus intends two things primarily: be forgiven and follow.

[[29]](#endnote-29)

1. This saber dance between the expressions Miaphysitism and Monophysitism is largely a smokescreen to soften the fact that a bitter internecine war still rages over this conflict and no solution has been yet found. Stripped of dicing meanings and subtleties of semantics, Miaphysitism and Monophysitism mean exactly the same thing. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. This is, most likely, a gross over simplification; we expect that modern “Nestorians” would reject this caricature of their faith. It can hardly be true under careful scrutiny, since Rome and The Church of the East have reconciled, considering themselves to be sister churches. Various Dyophysite views are always open to accusations of Nestorianism on the part of fault finders. This is inevitable, since there are no words that perfectly express the ineffable Mystery. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. This is also, most likely, a gross over simplification; we expect that modern “Eutychians” would similarly reject this caricature of their faith. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. This seems to be the wording Eutyches, even though he himself was later rejected as being Monophysite. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dyophysitism>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miaphysitism>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monophysitism>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chalcedonian_Christianity>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chalcedonian_Definition>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nestorius>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyril_of_Alexandria> [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. note 5 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. note 5 [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Mono and mia, as opposed to dyo or duo [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Meyendorff is to be commended for seeking this gentle approach; however, we believe that there is a better solution. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. note 5 [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Council_of_Ephesus> [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Not to be confused with Cyril of Jerusalem (313-386), who was from one to three previous generations: equivalent to being Cyril of Alexandria’s (376-444) father, grandfather, or even great-grandfather. Their lives only overlap by about ten years.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyril_of_Jerusalem>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyril_of_Alexandria> [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_the_East> [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sasanian_Empire> [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Common_Christological_Declaration_Between_the_Catholic_Church_and_the_Assyrian_Church_of_the_East> [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. It is no great secret of Church history that Cyril of Alexandria was an egomaniacal abuser of episcopal power. Emperor Theodosius Ⅱ likened him to a “proud pharaoh”. To the Nestorians he was a “monster”. He was implicated in three murders, and was known to have instigated rioting and mob rule on more than one occasion. He was remembered for his scholarly brilliance, which was defiled by his public behavior.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyril_of_Alexandria> [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Council_of_Ephesus> [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eutychianism> [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Council_of_Chalcedon>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neo-chalcedonism> [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Meyendorff> [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Council_of_Chalcedon#Relics_of_Nestorianism> [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acacius_of_Beroea> [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Council_of_Chalcedon#Eutychian_controversy> [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eusebius_of_Dorylaeum>

Not to be confused with Eusebius of Caesarea (circa 260-340), over a century earlier.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eusebius> [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. [www.earlychurchtexts.com/public/cyrilofalex\_twelve\_anathemas.htm](http://www.earlychurchtexts.com/public/cyrilofalex_twelve_anathemas.htm) [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Council_of_Chalcedon>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chalcedonian_Definition> [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. 1 Corinthians 11:14 (where φύσις describes physical human life; not nature as a philosophical category); James 3:7 (species); Romans 1:26; 2:14, 27; 11:21, 24 (discussing the nature of Israel under the trope of an olive tree); Galatians 2:15; 4:8; Ephesians 2:3 (where φύσις and σαρκὸς are intimately related); 2 Peter 1:4 (note the possible exception in the phrase, godlike (adjective) partners (noun) of nature (genitive noun); which is to say natural partners of godlikeness: natural partners, rather than natural godlikeness; partners of nature, not godlike of nature: partners, partakers, or participants of the divine nature is a distorted translation). It is self-contradictory to use φύσις to describe the οὐσία τοῦ θεοῦ, the Trinity, any ὑπόστασις of the Trinity, or any attribute of these. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. The word, point, is used anthropomorphically here; since man is incapable of conceiving in other than Cartesian coordinates: we simply refer to God’s omnipresence or ubiquity. God is not distributed or spread everywhere (which is pantheism); rather, God is wholly present everywhere. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. If you have been blessed or helped by any of these meditations, please repost, share, or use any of them as you wish. No rights are reserved. They are designed and intended for your free participation. They were freely received, and are freely given. No other permission is required for their use. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)