

## THE HERESY CALLED NESTORIANISM

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In your last class on heresy, I was told you discussed Arianism. Today, we shall be talking on the heresy called Nestorianism. But before then, let us quickly have a recap of what was discussed in the last class, bearing in mind that today's class is more of a continuation of the events that surrounds the heresies called Arianism, Macedonianism and Apollinarism.

We already know from our past class that Arianism is an offshoot of a priest called Arius, born in the year 280 AD in the city of Alexandria in Egypt. A very intelligent priest of the Eastern Orthodoxy who preached the heretical doctrine that Jesus as the son of God is not of the same existence with God and that he is not Co-Eternal and that he was created and could never have been God. This his assertion majorly led to the first council of the Church in the year 325, May 20, called the Council of Nicaea which takes its name from the place of the council (with about 314 bishops in attendance). During this council, as a means of curbing the erroneous teaching of Arius, the council fathers came up with what we have as the Nicæan Creed today which we use during the Mass. Though the other part of this creed was formed as the result of the other two heresies mentioned which was dealt with during the second council of the church in the year 381 (56years after the first council at Nicaea). This was where the other part of the creed was formulated in order to teach the distinct nature of the Holy Spirit.

Having said all the above, we shall now turn our attention basically to the business of the day, the heresy called Nestorianism.

### PROPONENTS OF NESTORIANISM

The major characters of this heresy are no other persons than Nestorius who gave birth to the heresy itself and Saint Cyril of Alexandria (fondly called "The Theologian" in the East who antagonised vehemently this heresy.

### HISTORICAL TRADJECTORY OF NESTORIANISM

Now 106years has come and gone since the first Council at Nicaea where the council fathers met for the first time to deal with Arius and his heretical doctrine. There seem to be no rest for the Church since the time of Arius, priests where more of novelties than sound doctrine, they were

seeking for fame instead of genuinely teaching the doctrine that has been handed over. On the positive side, this period saw the formulation of so many doctrines in the Church as a result of many heresies.

The heresy called Nestorianism was a seed of a Bishop called Nestorius. Nestorius was born at Germanicia, near Antioch in Syria. He studied with the monks and was a very bright pupil in his early ages. At the age of 24 he was ordained as a monk priest and was assigned to Constantinople (hope you haven't forgotten about the importance of Constantinople?) Here due to his sharp mind, he was the teacher of Scripture to the Monks and the Clergy. Even Saint Crysostom, the then archbishop of Constantinople recognized his unique ability to teach and preach and invited him to the Cathedral on Sundays. After the death of Atticus, the archbishop of Constantinople (for the saintly archbishop has been exiled due to the instigation of Eudixia who happens to be the sister of the emperor at that time)

After Nestorius became the archbishop, he worked strenuously as promised on the day of his consecration that he will rout out all heretics from the city and make Constantinople an ideal city of faith. In fact, he destroyed both the churches of Arians and Macedonians, he dealt with the Pelagians (this is another heretical sect, borne out of the doctrine of the Monk called Pelagius. He taught that there is nothing like Original Sin, therefore he attributed to human beings the ability to choose good by themselves without God as aide. He said that God only reward human effort since they can effect their own salvation by themselves. This heresy was condemned in the fifth century and was finally dealt with during the council at Trent). Within a year he already proved to the entire Christendom as the defender of the faith. How can such a person so zealous as Nestorius get it wrong? Or better still, where did he get it wrong?

## THE BIRTH OF NESTORIANISM

On a fine Sunday morning in the year 429 at the Cathedral of Constantinople, Nestorius, the archbishop of the see preached a powerful homily as usual. Only that this time, his homily contains some basic threats to the Christian faith and doctrine. In his homily, he said that "there are two persons in Jesus, the Divine and Human Persons". For him, Mary can never be said to be the mother of God as traditionally taught by the Church, this is unsound doctrine for him. Hence the title "Theotokos" is not fit for Mary. His logical argument is that God cannot be borne by

human and cannot die, since Jesus died on the cross. So for him, Mary was only the mother of the Man Jesus (Christo-tokos).

When some of the Monks heard this, they quickly sought help from Saint Cyril who studied the teaching of Nestorius and reprove it, saying to him to recount his erroneous teaching. But Nestorius maintained that his doctrine was right even with scriptural back-ups, as well as the support of the emperor (the Christian Emperor Theodosius. Nestorius even wrote a letter out of confidence to the pope, pope Celestine, telling him how he defended the right doctrine of Mariology and Christology of Jesus and how he punished with excommunication all who opposed him (due to distance, this letter took nearly six months to get to the Pope)

Since the archbishop has the full support of the Emperor, Cyril knew what he was waging against. So he wrote to the pope as well, telling him to write to all bishops, warning them of this new form of heresy. In August 11, 430, the pope replied Cyril and showed a great pleasure and consolation in the teaching of Saint Cyril and asked him to free all those that have been excommunicated due to the heretical teaching of Nestorius. The pope also sanctioned Cyril to call his brother bishop (Nestorius) to order, asking him to write a letter of withdrawal of this heretical teaching. In December 13, 430, Cyril officially summoned Nestorius to recant his heretical doctrine. But Nestorius was adamant.

Having met with his friend John (he did not give Nestorius his support because he found him guilty of heresy). Nestorius implode the aid of the emperor to summon a council so as to settle once and for all this issue, thinking he will win. So in the year 431, in the month of June and the day 7 of the month, a council was to meet at Ephesus and discuss theologically the issue on ground (note that this same town was the town virgin Mary, John the beloved and Saint Paul lived).

The pope could not attend but he sent three delegates with his letter to be read at the council. Only the bishops of the East were invited for this council as against the council of Nicaea, and only 250 bishops came. The bishop of Ephesus, Memmon was chosen to preside over the council. Nevertheless, due to some reasons, the council did not start on the scheduled day. It was on the 23rd of June that the meeting started with Cyril as the president and about 159 bishops. Note that Nestorius was not present at this meeting but his issue was discussed nonetheless. At

this meeting, 125 bishops voted against Nestorius and his teaching and was said that anyone who will not anathematize Nestorius should in turn be proclaimed anathema.

The council Fathers accepted the title Theotokos for Mary as fit to her role and identity. Nestorius was dismissed as a bishop and excommunicated. When the news was read to the people of Ephesus, the town went mad with joy (don't forget that this town is a cradle for the mother of God and honour of her was at a very high stake in the town.

After the whole meeting, the bishops of Antioch that were absent came and when Cyril told them of the outcome, they didn't sign the document and instigated the emperor to call for another council and he consented. Even at this new council, after the letter of pope Celestine was read, the fathers unanimously condemned the teaching of Nestorius and exiled John of Antioch and every member of his party who refused to vote against Nestorius. The excommunication of Nestorius was made canonical.