Lectures on Early Heresies and Councils

Lecture 1: Tracing the Birth of Orthodoxy

Philippians 2: 6-11: an Aramaic hymn acclaiming our Lord as pre-existent ("being in form of God"), as incarnate ("taking form of servant") and as returning to glory ("highly exalted, given name above every name"). Exclusion of "frog-prince Christology" requires accepting two natures in the Lord Jesus.

Pre-existence in "form of God" poses the problem of two Gods. The problem is solved by appeal to Proverbs 8:22ff, where God's Wisdom is before all creatures and works "with God" in creation. This Wisdom is relatively distinct from God the Father but substantially the same as He. (Cf. Wisdom of Solomon 7: 22-29.) So Christ is the Wisdom of God incarnate? Yes, says 1 Corinthians 1:24.

Lecture 2: The Road to Nicaea and the Work of the Council

Athenagoras, *Apology,* c. 10: . . . "we also admit the Son of God; and don't tell me it's ridiculous that God should have a Son, for we do not conceive God the Father and God the Son after the fashion of the poets. . . . but the Son of God is the Word of the Father in idea and in power, since through Him all things have been made, the Father and the Son being but one. The Son is in the Father, and the Father is in the Son, by the unity and power of the Spirit. The Son of God is the intelligence and Word of the Father. And if in your high wisdom you wish to know that "Son" means, I will tell you briefly. He was the offspring of the Father, not in the sense that He was produced (because God from the beginning, being an eternal intelligence, had His Word with Him, since He is eternally reasonable [*logikos*]; but [He became a Son in being pronounced] in order that, in all material things . . . there might be idea and energy among them, coming from without. This is what the prophetic Spirit teaches: "the Lord created me to be the beginning of His ways in the accomplishment of His works."

This is good except for the mistake at the end, found also in Justin Martyr and Tertullian: Christ is eternally the Word but becomes the Son when pronounced at Creation. Paul of Samosata makes the Word itself a speech act and misuses the word '*homoousios*'.

After the Sabellian crisis, the Church enjoys peaceful possession of Orthodoxy: the Creed of St. Gregory the Wonder Worker (295 A.D.)

The Nicene Creed and anathemata. "We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, creator of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten [*gennēthēs*] only-begotten [*monogenēs*] of the Father, that is, of the Father's substance [*ousia*], God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, consubstantial [*homoousios*] with the Father; through whom All things were made in heaven and on earth; who, for us men and for our salvation, came down, was incarnate and became man; who suffered and rose again on the third day, ascended into Heaven, and will come again to judge the living and the dead; and [we believe] in the Holy Spirit.

"As for those who say, 'There was a "then" when He was not' and 'Before he was begotten, he did not exist' and 'He came to be from what was not, or from a different hypostasis or substance' or 'The Son of God is created, changeable, mutable', the Catholic Church anathematizes them."

Lecture 3: From Constantinople I to Chalcedon

An Arian rearguard, the pneumatomachi, are dealt with at an Eastern synod held at Constantinople in 381; this synod was later accepted (by universal consent) as an ecumenical Council.

Meanwhile, for talking about the Trinity, the Latin church had had a stable vocabulary since 230: in God there is one *substantia* and three *personae*. Now the Alexandrian synod of 360 settles Greek usage: in God there is one *ousia* and three *hypostases*. But what is a *hypostasis*? St. Basil's account: common nature plus individuating traits.

The source of ancient Marian devotion and the term *theotokos,* God-bearer.

Theodore of Mopsuestia has his doubts in these two fragments. (1) "When people ask us if Mary is man-bearer (*anthropotokos*) or God-bearer, we should say she is both. She is man-bearer according to nature, since it was a man who was in her womb and came out . . . and she is God-bearer because He was *present in* the man whom she bore, according to a disposition of His will." (2) "It is folly to say that the Word consubstantial with the Father was born of the Virgin Mary. For the one born of the Virgin is the one formed of her substance, not the Word who is God. The eternal Word of the Father has no mother."

Nestorius tries to pacify the two sides. He says: she didn't exactly bear God, but God was in the one whom she bore. So let's call her *Christotokos*.

St. Cyril of Alexandria protests: you are dividing Christ in two; Nestorius replies by introducing the term *prosōpon* (a rôle or character in a play).

Text from the Council of Ephesus (431 AD): "We do not say that the Word's nature became flesh through a change in itself, and we also do not say that the Word was turned into a human being composed of body and soul. Rather, we say that the Word 'became man' in an inexpressible and incomprehensible way, uniting to Himself according to hypostasis (*kath'hypostasin*) flesh animated by a rational soul; and He existed as a Son of man not by mere will nor by just taking on a rôle. The two natures remain diverse; yet by coming together into a real union, they yield for us one Christ and one Son."

New trouble from a radical monk named Eutyches and a new patriarch of Alexandria named Dioscuros. "From two natures" but not "in or of two natures." Hence monophysitism. The "robber council of Ephesus."

The Council of Chalcedon: "In line with the Fathers, we confess one Lord Jesus Christ, perfect in divinity, perfect in humanity . . . consubstantial with the Father according to His divinity, consubstantial with us according to His humanity, being like us in all things save sin (Hb 4:15).

"One and the same Christ is to be acknowledged in two natures (without confusion, change, or division) . . . concurring in one person and hypostasis . . ."