

LATER CREEDS

Third Council of Constantinople (681 AD, Sixth Ecumenical)

This council further clarified the Definition of Chalcedon, dealing with the question of whether the two natures of Jesus Christ (God and man) had two separate wills as well. The issue was important because of the existence of the Monophysite (one nature) heresy, which maintained that Jesus Christ has only one nature, truncating to some degree His humanity in favor of His divinity. Some taught that notwithstanding Jesus' two natures, He had only one will. The Third Council of Constantinople rejected this view as being too close to the teaching of the Monophysites. The statement is an effort to tread the line between the Monophysite and the Nestorian heresies.

The Statement of Faith of the Third Council of Constantinople (681 AD, Sixth Ecumenical)

We also proclaim two natural willings or wills in him and two natural operations, without separation, without change, without partition, without confusion, according to the teaching of the holy Fathers -- and two natural wills not contrary to each other, God forbid, as the impious heretics have said they would be, but his human will following, and not resisting or opposing, but rather subject to his divine and all-powerful will. For it was proper for the will of the flesh to be moved naturally, yet to be subject to the divine will, according to the all-wise Athanasius. For as his flesh is called and is the flesh of God the Word, so also the natural will of his flesh is called and is God the Word's own will, as he himself says: "I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of the Father who sent me," calling the will of the flesh his own, as also the flesh had become his own. For in the same manner that his all-holy and spotless ensouled flesh, though divinized, was not destroyed, but remained in its own law and principle also his human will, divinized, was not destroyed, but rather preserved, as Gregory the divine says: "His will, as conceived of in his character as the Saviour, is not contrary to God, being wholly divinized." We also glorify two natural operations in the same our Lord Jesus Christ, our true God, without separation, without change, without partition, without confusion, that is, a divine operation and a human operation, as the divine preacher Leo most clearly says: "For each form does what is proper to it, in communion with the other; the Word, that is, performing what belongs to the Word, and the flesh carrying out what belongs to the flesh." We will not therefore grant the existence of one natural operation of God and the creature, lest we should either raise up into the divine nature what is created, or bring down the preeminence of the divine nature into the place suitable for things that are made. For we recognize the wonders and the sufferings as of one and the same person], according to the difference of

the natures of which he is and in which he has his being, as the eloquent Cyril said.

Preserving therefore in every way the unconfused and undivided, we set forth the whole confession in brief; believing our Lord Jesus Christ, our true God, to be one of the holy Trinity even after the taking of flesh, we declare that his two natures shine forth in his one hypostasis, in which he displayed both the wonders and the sufferings through the whole course of his dispensation, not in phantasm but truly, the difference of nature being recognized in the same one hypostasis by the fact that each nature wills and works what is proper to it, in communion with the other. On this principle we glorify two natural wills and operations combining with each other for the salvation of the human race.

The Image Controversy (the Iconoclasts)

At the beginning of the 8th century, Leo III, emperor of the Eastern Roman empire, attacked the use of images as aids in worship. As such, he was the first leader of the iconoclasts (image breakers). Statues and icons of Jesus, Mary, and various other holy men and women were being used as aids in worship, and many ordinary Christians were failing to distinguish between the spiritual reality represented by the image and the image itself. Leo III came into power after a series of military defeats. There was also a major earthquake at the beginning of his reign. Some scholars have speculated the Leo launched his attack on the use of images because he felt that these disasters were the result of God's judgement. Other scholars think that he might have yielded to pressure from Jews and Muslims who stated that Christians were no longer obeying the commandment against idolatry. In any case, Leo III and successors for the next century or so fought against the use of images in worship. In 753, Constantine V, Leo's son, called a synod at which a gathering of 338 bishops produced the statement below:

The Synod of Constantinople (Hiera, 753 AD)

When, however, they are blamed for undertaking to depict the divine nature of Christ, which should not be depicted, they take refuge in the excuse: We represent only the flesh of Christ which we have seen and handled. But that is a Nestorian error. For it should be considered that that flesh was also the flesh of God the Word, without any separation, perfectly assumed by the divine nature and made wholly divine. How could it now be separated and represented apart? So is it with the human soul of Christ which mediates between the Godhead of the Son and the dullness of the flesh. As the human flesh is at the same time flesh of God the Word, so is the human soul also soul of God the Word, and both at the same time, the soul being deified as well as the body, and the Godhead remained undivided even in the separation of the

soul from the body in his voluntary passion. For where the soul of Christ is, there is also his Godhead; and where the body of Christ is, there too is his Godhead. If then in his passion the divinity remained inseparable from these, how do the fools venture to separate the flesh from the Godhead, and represent it by itself as the image of a mere man? They fall into the abyss of impiety, since they separate the flesh from the Godhead, ascribe to it a subsistence of its own, a personality of its own, which they depict, and thus introduce a fourth person into the Trinity. Moreover, they represent as not being made divine, that which has been made divine by being assumed by the Godhead. Whoever, then, makes an image of Christ, either depicts the Godhead which cannot be depicted, and mingles it with the manhood (like the Monophysites), or he represents the body of Christ as not made divine and separate and as a person apart, like the Nestorians.

The only admissible figure of the humanity of Christ, however, is bread and wine in the holy Supper. This and no other form, this and no other type, has he chosen to represent his incarnation . . .

Thirty-five years later, Irene, the regent for Constantine VI, called another council at which 350 bishops repudiated the decision documented above. The result of their deliberations is given below:

Council of Nicaea (7th Ecumenical, 787 AD)

To make our confession short, we keep unchanged all the ecclesiastical traditions handed down to us, whether in writing or verbally, one of which is the making of pictorial representations, agreeable to the history of the preaching of the Gospel, a tradition useful in many respects, but especially in this, that so the incarnation of the Word of God is shown forth as real and not merely fantastic, for these have mutual indications and without doubt have also mutual significations.

We, therefore, following the royal pathway and the divinely inspired authority of our Holy Fathers and the traditions of the Catholic Church (for, as we all know, the Holy Spirit indwells her), define with all certitude and accuracy that just as the figure of the precious and life-giving Cross, so also the venerable and holy images, as well in painting and mosaic as of other fit materials, should be set forth in the holy churches of God, and on the sacred vessels and on the vestments and on hangings and in pictures both in houses and by the wayside, to wit, the figure of our Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ, of our spotless Lady, the Mother of God, of the honourable Angels, of all Saints and of all pious people. For by so much more frequently as they are seen in artistic representation, by so much more readily are men lifted up to the memory of their prototypes, and to a longing

after them; and to these should be given due salutation and honorable reverence not indeed that true worship of faith which pertains alone to the divine nature; but to these, as to the figure of the precious and life-giving Cross and to the Book of the Gospels and to the other holy objects, incense and lights may be offered according to ancient pious custom. For the honor which is paid to the image passes on to that which the image represents, and he who reveres the image reveres in it the subject represented . . .

I have included these two documents to show that the debate over the use of images in worship is not new; that it is, in fact, part of an ongoing debate over what is to be worshipped. The sources which I have examined (these are, admittedly, works by protestant authors), indicated that there were various branches of the church which opposed or supported the iconoclast position to varying degrees, and that the documents produced by the iconoclasts of the 8th and 9th centuries were the basis of the position taken by the reformers in the 16th century.

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