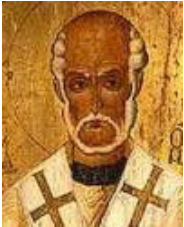


ADVOCATES FOR HUMAN SPIRITUAL RIGHTS: Nestorius, Part 1



Nestorius,
Patriarch
of
Constantin
ople

Nestorius (born circa AD 386, perhaps of Persian parents, in Germanicia, a small town in the patriarchate of Antioch on the fertile plain at the foot of Mount Taurus in the Euphrates district of Syria, now known as Kahramanmaras, South Turkey – died circa 451 at Panopolis, now Akhmim, in the desert of the Egyptian Thebaid) was consecrated Patriarch of Constantinople on April 10, 428 and served until June 22, 431, when he was deposed and later sent into exile. Little is known of the details of Nestorius's life outside of the records kept in the months leading up to and during the council at which he was deposed. He received his education near Antioch, at the neighboring monastery of Saint Euprepus, probably as a pupil of Theodore, Bishop of Mopsuestia, the early companion and friend of the then late patriarch John Chrysostom. As a monk, Nestorius gained a reputation for asceticism and eloquence. Elevated to the coveted position of Bishop of Constantinople and Patriarch of the East, Nestorius was one of the last high official representatives of the catholic and orthodox Imperial Church to hold uncompromisingly to doctrines regarding the

nature of Christ that are necessary tenets for one to recognize and acknowledge the manifestation of God as Christ in the Second Advent Age. In his capacity as bishop and defender of the faith, he upheld the doctrines of his teacher Theodore, who distinguished between the “man whom God put on” in the Incarnation and the Logos who put on the man, and who spoke of the divinity of Christ as an “indwelling” of the Logos in the man. For Nestorius, the Incarnation occurred for the purpose of revelation, and union in Christ was the perfect revelation of God. The opponents of Nestorius made of his position a heresy and used his name to anathematize those churches of the East that they could not reconcile to themselves by naming those churches for him. After Nestorius, catholic and orthodox doctrine promoted one or another conception of Jesus as man-God.

There is nothing harder to the souls of men than the sickness of ignorance.

– the opening of a homily by Nestorius



Council of Constantinople 381, fresco

from Stavropoleos Church, Bucharest,
Romania

The Imperial Stage

There are two dramatic elements at work in the theater of the christological controversy: imperious church councils and longstanding rivalries. Both play out across centuries and shape the tragic fate of our protagonist, Nestorius. General church councils mark the opening, the climax, and the denouement of the drama. The drama opens with the Council of Constantinople (381) requiring all those who would call themselves orthodox Christians to believe that Jesus Christ was and is God incarnate, and to confess that God is a single divine being eternally existing as three distinct persons or subsistencies. The climax of the drama takes place at the Council of Ephesus (431), which ends with all Christians of the Imperial Church bound to a dogmatic formula taken almost word for word from the letters written to Nestorius by his main antagonist, Cyril of Alexandria: "One and the same is the eternal Son of the Father and the Son of the Virgin Mary, born in time after the flesh; therefore, she may rightly be called Mother of God." The denouement begins at the Council of Chalcedon (451), with the acceptance of the "Rule of Faith" expounded at Ephesus by Cyril and the adoption of a reconciliatory Definition of Christ, it continues to unfold over the next 1,543 years.

The second major element of the tragedy is the deadly rivalry between the Christian leaders of Antioch and Alexandria. The city of Alexandria, which at times rivaled Rome as cultural headquarters of the empire and to which theological focus shifted during the second and third centuries, envies the new upstart capital, Constantinople. Antioch, with less influence than Alexandria in the imperial scheme of things but with an old and venerable heritage as the first city where Christians were so called, looks to the new imperial city as a place to regain influence and power. Constantinople, with no great

heritage itself, is the stage of action, a "power vacuum" to be filled: Whoever is Bishop of Constantinople is Patriarch of the Eastern Church.

At the council that opens the drama in 381, the christology of Apollinarius, the theological hero of Alexandria, is condemned. Antiochenes consider this a great victory; Alexandrians, a defeat. By the time Nestorius is appointed patriarch, Alexandrians are not only resentful about Apollinarius but fearful that their greatest hero, Athanasius, may too be criticized if not condemned. The appointment of Nestorius comes as a blow to the Alexandrian dream of domination but also as an opportunity to regain it, and Alexandrian spies lurk around the capital watching and waiting to catch Nestorius or some other Antiochene repeating some old Antiochene heresy.