6-2020

Two *Prosōpa,* one *Prosōpon;* the Christology of Nestorius of Constantinople

Danijel Uremovic

The University of Notre Dame Australia

TWO *PROSŌPA*, ONE *PROSŌPON*
THE CHRISTOLOGY OF NESTORIUS OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Danijel Uremović

Introduction

The episode of Nestorius versus Cyril is well known to students of early Church history. The controversy centred around the enumeration of *persons* in the Incarnate Christ, with the popular account ascribing a duality of persons to the thought of Nestorius. The Council, under the heavy hand of Cyril, rightly condemned this view.[1] It will be our purpose here, however, to establish the accuracy of this long and oft-unquestioned history. We will begin with an overview of the controversy and its central themes. Following, we will identify the cardinal terms of the debate and seek to establish their meaning according to Nestorius. From here, we will attempt to systematise these findings and seek an answer to the question "was Nestorius, Nestorian?"

Overview of the Problem

The happenings at Ephesus begin less as a Christological issue than as a Marian one. The appellation *Theotokos* (God-bearer) became the touchstone of the discussion, as the competing Antiochene and Alexandrian schools sought an answer to the question "to whom (or what) did the Virgin Mary give birth?"[2] Quickly the exchange turned to a Christological problem, whence the popular presentation of Nestorius' two-person Christology. This portrait usually goes on to suggest that Nestorius believed in two Sons, and that their union was basically a "moral" union – a harmony of either person's will with the other.[3] Appropriately, this position was condemned by Cyril and the Council of Ephesus. Aside from the popular

---

[1] Norman P. Tanner, ed. *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1990), 61-62.

[2] Charles Joseph Hefele, *A History of the Council of the Church from the Original Documents* vol. III (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1883), 13.

[3] Beginning, of course, with Cyril. His initial correction of Nestorius, for example, reveals a reading or suspicion ("[f]or I do not greatly trust the documents being circulated" *Letter 2* in *Letters 1-50*, trans. by John I. McEnerney (Washington DC: CUA Press, 1987), 34) of Nestorius' Christology as bi-personal (see *Letter 4* in *Letters 1-50*, 41). Modern examples can be seen in Bedjan (whose assessment of Nestorius concerning the Incarnation flirts with our own conclusions, despite ultimately dismissing the presence of any real union in Nestorius' Christology), Jugie and Relton. Carl E. Braaten, "Modern Interpretations of Nestorius" *Church History* 32, no. 3 (1963): 5, 10.

historical retelling, however, there is the current scholarly context which permits our review of Nestorius' theology. The (relatively) recent discovery of a more sizable work by the heresiarch[4] has since invited a considerable deal of scholarship,[5] with many revising what was thitherto the consensus.[6] Before engaging with certain of these interpretations, however, we do well to consider the basic terms that Nestorius adopts in his explication of the incarnational union.[7]

Nestorius' Christology

i.   *Clarifying Terms.*

Given how frequently theological controversy has been shown reducible to concerns of language, it is sensible to consider the key terms of Nestorius' Christology. His lexicon is notoriously confusing. Against his contemporaries and others in the lengthier tradition before him, his words often assume unlike meanings.[8] Even within his own work apparent inconsistencies may be noted. Bethune-Baker relates some of these key terms with their Greek and Syriac equivalents as such:[9]

---

[4] Namely, *The Book* or *Bazaar of Heracleides*. Nestorius, *Liber Heraclidis*, trans. F. Nau, P. Bedjan, ed., (Leipzig and Paris, 1910); as well as the English translation, *The Bazaar of Heracleides*. G. R. Driver and L. Hodgson (Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2002). All citations of Nestorius from this work will be taken from the English edition, hereafter *Bazaar.* Concerning the authenticity of parts of the text, see Roberta C. Chesnut, "The Two Prosopa in Nestorius' 'Bazaar of Heracleides'" *The Journal of Theological Studies* 29, no. 2 (October 1978): 392-398 and Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*: *From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, trans. John Bowden (London: Mowbrays, 1975), 501-504. The bulk of our study will draw from the pages of the *Bazaar* beyond the opening dialogue, despite the good reasons to accept its authenticity.

[5] For a concise presentation of the major positions in modern Nestorian scholarship, see Braaten, "Modern Interpretations of Nestorius," 251-267. The catalogue of authors is not exhaustive and is today outdated. However, the authors presented are representative of the key positions, and are more or less the voices guiding all contemporary studies.

[6] Consequent of the limited data. For the available sources of Nestorius scholarship, consult John McGuckin, *Saint Cyril of Alexandria and the Christological Controversy* (New York: Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004), 126-130.

[7] Despite the markedly philosophical terms of the debate must be understood as the *ancillae* to Nestorius' and Cyril's theological purposes. Both, in some way, took up a metaphysics to expound their views. Nestorius (and Cyril, undoubtedly) drew heavily from the scriptures, with the systems of classical learning serving only to clarify what was already contained in Revelation. Nestorius' *Bazaar* is replete with scriptural insights (consider, for example, his interpretation of Philippians 2; *Bazaar*, 164-166, 207.), and so the reader should not allow the coming speculation and abstraction to undermine Nestorius' efforts as a genuinely scriptural thinker. For the question of Nestorius' metaphysics see Friedrich Loofs, *Nestorius and His Place in the History of Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914) and Hodgson, "The Metaphysics of Nestorius" *The Journal of Theological Studies* 19, no. 73 (1917): 46-55.

[8] For a concise presentation of this in the case of *prosōpon*, see Driver and Hodgson, *Appendix III to Bazaar*, 402-410.

[9] J. F. Bethune-Baker, *Nestorius and His Teaching: A Fresh Examination of the Evidence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1908), 47-50, 54. McGuckin, Grillmeier, and Hodgson, propose the four terms as the heart of the controversy – the four basic levels of any metaphysical analysis. Hodgson groups *ousia* and *hypostasis*, thereby counting three realities. See McGuckin, *Saint Cyril of Alexandria*, 138; Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 456; Hodgson, *Appendix IV to Bazaar*, 412-414.

person, etc.[10]	*prosōpon*	*parṣōpā*
substance[11]	*ousia*, *hypostasis*	*q'nōmā*
nature[12]	*physis*	*k'yānā*

One may, of course, pick up on other technical terms as, say, *schema* ("appearance" or "form")[13] or *idiomata* ("properties").[14] These, however, are shown to be more or less reducible to other terms. Again, though less a term than a concept, one ought to count "union" among the key pieces of Nestorius' Christology. The difficulty, as we shall see, lies not only in the familiar problem of diverse meanings, but also in diverse language.[15] In any case, this core

[10] As we shall see, the term *prosōpon* has been various translated as "person," "appearance" (Loofs), "personality" (Bethune-Baker), "image" (Chestnut), "function" (provided and rejected by Bethune-Baker), "external aspect" (Kyle, McGuckin). See Friedrich Loofs, *Nestorius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914), 76-77, 79; Chesnut, c 399; Bethune-Baker, *Nestorius and His Teaching*, 51; Richard Kyle, "Nestorius: The Partial Rehabilitation of a Heretic" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 32.1 (1989): 79; McGuckin, *Saint Cyril of Alexandria*, 144. We will here maintain the Greek transliteration *prosōpon* to the end of avoiding any unnuanced or wanting translation. Concerning this and other technical terms and their English translations, we ought to be mindful of the final form and definition these took in the Scholastic synthesis and preceding conciliar developments (e.g. the Latin *substantia*, although a calque of the Greek *hypostasis,* serves as the popular translation for *ousia,* with *hypostasis* frequently reserved for its peculiar theological meaning of Person). We opt for the translations given here (save for "person"), as they best accord with modern theological-philosophical convention (even if such convention is itself not absolute).

[11] That is, the concrete existence of a particular thing, *qua* its numerical identity. Corresponds to the Latin *substantia* or *essentia*. Kyle appears to separate the two terms (*hypostasis* and *ousia*) as distinct categories, though his understanding of Nestorius' metaphysics is generally rather confused, even if his final assessment will accord with our own (see Kyle, "Nestorius," 82). Despite the distinction (if Kyle really regards one), this separate level of being rests safely between the concrete individual substance (at the bottom) and the phenomenal reality and attributes (up top), such that no injury is done to our reading of Nestorius, who simply seeks to posit these layers of being as necessarily opposed to their corresponding realities (i.e. *this* substance is not *that* substance, etc.). This ontological division will become clearer in due course (see fig. 1 and 2 on pages 7 and 9 respectively).

[12] Loofs, with Bethune-Baker, understands nature as the set of attributes proper to a substance. See Loofs, *Nestorius*, 66; and Bethune-Baker, *Nestorius and His Teaching,* 48.

[13] Driver and Hodgson further qualify this as a "form or appearance of a thing at any given moment," with multiple *schemata* unified as a *prosōpon* (as H_2O would underlie the *schemata* of ice and running water in their example). Driver and Hodgson, *Bazaar*, 15 fn. 2. See also Kyle, "Nestorius, " 80 fn. 33. This temporal qualification may serve to distinguish *schema* from one sense of *prosōpon*. Chesnut, by contrast, suggests both terms (*schema* and *prosōpon*) to be practical synonyms. Chesnut, "The Two Prosopa in Nestorius," 406-407.

[14] Corresponds to nature, as *schema* to *prosōpon*. *Schemata* and *idiomata* be perhaps be better distinguished per a *static – dynamic* distinction. Various *idiomata* and *schemata* make up a given nature and *prosōpon* respectively, with the *idiomata* comprising the definitional content of a nature, and the *schemata* constituting the dynamic operations of a *prosōpon*. A union of natures would constitute a conjunction of essential *idiomata*. Analogously, a union of *prosōpa* would be realised as a conjunction of these schematic attributes. As 1, 2 and 3 are all of the category "number," and as 3 is the sum of 1 and 2, the conjunction of two numbers produces yet one number. This numerical device works inasmuch as it reveals the category "number" (like *prosōpon*) to be open to a conjunction of other numbers while remaining the same *sort* of thing. Such is (theoretically and in a qualified sense) true of nature, although the *idiomata* that define either nature in Christ are such that their conjunction would entail a contradiction in the resultant nature.

[15] As far as meanings are concerned, the function of *prosōpon* remains the central puzzle of our inquiry. Diverse language denoting the same or similar concept, on the other hand, is found throughout, although one may cite the notion of "union" as especially problematic.

lexicon suffices for the commencement of our inquiry into Nestorius. None of their meanings may be gained in isolation through a purely historical or etymological examination of the Greek/Syriac usage. Rather, they must be ascertained against the internal evidence and the use of such terms in relation to one another. As such, let us consider Nestorius' use of these central terms.

ii.   *Ousia and Hypostasis*

The philosophical categories of *ousia* and *hypostasis* were both in classical thought and Nestorius' system largely interchangeable.[16] Either term served to point out an individual concrete reality. As time went on *hypostasis* assumed another sense that tends closer to our modern conception of "person."[17] Since *hypostasis* (with *ousia*) traditionally signified a particular individual substance, it was the placement of emphasis that would ultimately determine its meaning in a given context.[18] For Nestorius, such emphasis fell on the numerical identity of a substance. His criticism of nature divorced from *hypostasis* confirms this reading: "the natures are not without *hypostases*, nor in idea without the *hypostases* of the natures do they constitute [them] by sayings in reflection."[19] What this means for Nestorius is that the definitional content of a nature must have a real grounding in a being, lest the Incarnation be reducible to a façade. As such, we may content ourselves here with the translation of *hypostasis* as substance, properly qualified.

iii.   *Physis*

If *hypostasis* and *ousia* in their conventional use point out an individual substance, *physis* or nature serves to establish its identity, providing a *what* to a *that*. The divine and human substances are numerically separate, as are all substances. It is their coupling with, and

---

[16] Loofs, *Nestorius*, 71. As is noted, Nestorius opted more frequently for *hypostasis* than *ousia* in reference to Christ (Bethune-Baker, *Nestorius and His Teaching*, 49). Nevertheless, Nestorius is aware of the newer sense of *hypostasis* (Nestorius, *Bazaar,* 412; Bethune-Baker, *Nestorius and His Teaching* 50). For a puzzling instance of the terms taking different meanings, see Nestorius, *Bazaar,* 234, fn. 4.

[17] Such that *hypostasis* could serve the psychological function of a person's individual core. Bethune-Baker also provides the other sense of "person" that *hypostasis* carries in the theological context. He states: "The word [*hypostasis*] had been narrowed down from its wider meaning 'substance' and forced to do duty for the conception of the particular 'modes of existence' of the one God with constituted God a Trinity." Bethune-Baker, *Nestorius*, 50.

[18] Namely on either the qualitative or quantitative distinctiveness of a given substance. For this reason, we may speak of the Godhead's common *hypostasis* (the divine essence), although it is more common these days to regard the divine Persons as three *hypostases*. See, for example, Jerome's letter to Damasus, where he permits either use of the term when properly qualified; Jerome, *Epistle XV* (PL 22, 355-358). Note also his remark about the historical usage of *hypostasis* in classical learning.

[19] Nestorius, *Bazaar,* 322.

inevitable assumption of, a proper nature that makes the discussion of union possible as well as problematic. We mentioned above the idea of nature as a collection of properties or attributes.[20] It is these properties that are "combined for the competition of a nature."[21] "[T]he [properties] of the nature are definite" [22] writes Nestorius, such that Christ's Incarnation demands that "he ha[ve] according to nature all [the properties] of a man."[23]

iv.   *Prosōpon*

Despite the popular portrait of his two-person Christology, Nestorius is seen to speak more of a single *prosōpon* than of two *prosōpa*.[24] Aside from this numerical discrepancy, there is the added temptation of rendering *prosōpon* as "person," despite the fact that it fits neither the traditional meanings of classical Greek, nor Nestorius' own usage. Among these traditional translations we find "*face, visage, countenance… mask, dramatic part*, or *character… outward appearance, beauty*."[25] Any association with person is "always… *as regarded from the outside*, not the inner ego."[26] For Nestorius' purposes, certain of these translations better reflect his thought (perhaps "countenance" or "outward appearance"), yet none of them seems to arrive at his intention perfectly. Chesnut counts three senses to his technical use of *prosōpon*, which are worth considering.[27] At times *prosōpon* serves [1] to relate a function of the will. At other times it [2] carries the idea of "activity or operation." In this way none "of the prophets nor of the angels [has] been seen to make use of the *prosōpon* of God."[28] Christ, by contrast, made use of "all the operations of his *prosōpon*."[29] Finally, according to Chesnut, it bears [3] revelatory significance: "[T]he *prosōpon* [makes known] the *ousia*"[30] such that one ought not to consider "the *prosōpa* without the *hypostasis* and… the *ousia*"[31] inasmuch as "the *prosōpon* exists not without the *ousia*."[32] This third function of *prosōpon* accords especially with the

---

[20] *Supra*, fn 11.
[21] Nestorius, *Bazaar,* 35
[22] Nestorius, *Bazaar,* 36.
[23] Nestorius, *Bazaar,* 35.
[24] Loofs, *Nestorius*, 78-79. Note his critique of Bethune-Baker's claim (Bethune-Baker, *Nestorius and His Teaching*, 49) concerning the occurrences of *prosōpon/prosōpa.* According to Loofs, the preference for two *prosōpa* (over the singular form) is not as infrequent as Bethune-Baker may lead the reader to think.
[25] *Appendix III in Bazaar*, 402
[26] *Appendix III in Bazaar*, 402.
[27] Chesnut, "The Two Prosopa in Nestorius," 406-406.
[28] Nestorius, *Bazaar,* 52. Being inspired by God, they do not act in his *prosōpon*, so as to warrant an identification of their act with God's. Any mention of God acting in them is necessarily in a more remote sense than the Christological instance.
[29] Nestorius, *Bazaar,* 147.
[30] Nestorius, *Bazaar,* 158.
[31] Nestorius, *Bazaar,* 228.
[32] Nestorius, *Bazaar,* 170.

proposed translation of "appearance," although the broader philosophical understanding of *act* can perhaps serve to harmonise all three of these otherwise unrelated notions.[33]

v.   Henōsis, synapheia and other senses of "union"

The Nestorian controversy considers the incarnational union on several different levels. We have, first of all, the textbook dichotomy of a moral or voluntary union (Nestorius' "*henōsis kat' eudokian*")[34] against a hypostatic union (Cyril's "*henōsis kath' hypostasin*").[35] In addition to this pairing, Nestorius also spoke in terms of a prosopic union, with the further nuance of a "physical" union as either [1] *natural* or [2] *of nature*.[36] Again, there is the generic descriptor of "conjunction" (*synapheia*), which also deserves consideration. Let us begin with the *natural – of nature* division, and thereby consider the subsequent formulations of union.

A union *of nature* considers the question as one of location, identifying where in Christ exists union and opposition. Quite unanimously, Nestorius is taken to defend a union of *prosōpon,* upholding an opposition on the levels of nature and substance. We may represent the prosopic union against the other ontological strata of opposition and division thus:

---

[33] The classical notion of act is here useful to consider. By it, one may well understand acts as the products of efficient causes, but even more broadly, consider them less in the way of busy occurrences, e.g. as a phenomenal appearance (a substance's act of self-disclosure) or "the act of being." As we shall see, it is this extensive exchange of functions – rooted in either nature – that characterise the prosopic union as something unconfused, yet metaphysically grounded. Any mention of appearance, especially in reference to the divine should be read in this sense, so as to encompass all aspects of Christ's acting, not merely the sensible appearances nor the agent at work.

[34] As in J. Mark Armitage, *A Twofold Solidarity: Leo the Great's Theology of Redemption* (Strathfield: St Pauls, 2005), 133.

[35] Bethune-Baker, *Nestorius and His Teaching*, 91.

[36] Again, granting ear to Cyril's less than clear language. Nestorius, *Bazaar*, 86.

fig 1. Levels of Union and Opposition in Christ

Hypostasis	Divine substance[37]	Jesus' humanity
Nature	Divine nature	Human nature
Idiomata	Various features of "divinity" that define God	Various features of "humanity" that define man
Natural prosōpa	Divine appearance	Human appearance
Schemata	Various attributes, states or function of the divine	Various attributes, states or function of human nature
Prosōpon of the union	Single historical appearance/unity/subject – the Word made flesh, with either nature's catalogue of attributes, powers, etc. brought together	
Schemata	Various attributes, etc. of God and man brought together.	

Recalling Nestorius' peculiar use of *prosōpa* (not as persons, but attributes, appearances, functions), we may begin to harmonise the single and dual formulations of Christ's *prosōpon*/*prosōpa*. Are they to be counted as one, two or three? In varying ways, all are fair enumerations. In the dual it denotes the phenomenal manifestation proper to either nature, what Loofs thinks Nestorius would ascribe to everything.[38] Both the divine and the human retain their proper "appearances" or set of "operations". In a single *prosōpon* then, we should recognise Nestorius' commitment to a unified Christ as the historical meeting-place of God and man. If either *prosōpon* is taken as the accumulation of various *schemata*, the conjunction of two schematic listings can be seen to constitute a new *prosōpon*. Reserving this conjunction to the prosopic level, Nestorius avoids any metaphysical confusion: proper attributes are preserved and no *tertium quid* arises as a result. The exchange of prosopic attributes occurs around one unified object of revelation – Christ. God, prior to the Incarnation, had no human appearance or *prosōpon*. A man who is not himself God cannot be spoken of as having a divine appearance – such is proper to God alone. In this way, *prosōpon* may be understood as providing a weaker label for the historical fact of the God-man, saying less in the way of either nature or substance's association with the other. As such, this reading is

---

[37] Modern sensibilities would provide "Logos" or a similar designation to the hypostatic level on the side of divinity. Given the evidence, (e.g. Nestorius, *Bazaar*,) we may reasonably opt for this identification of the divine substance with *hypostasis*, granting the consequent lack of a personal core in Nestorius' system. Our later discussion will address this. For our current purpose, it does not affect Nestorius' case for the prosopic union.

[38] That is, as something impersonal, lest all existents be regarded as having their own person.

favoured as being the only one that may consistently uphold the singular and dual numberings of *prosōpa*, without affirming a contradiction[39] or surrendering any one of Nestorius' theological commitments.

Having explored the local question concerning the union (*of nature*), let us consider its related modal problem (*natural*). Nestorius' prosopic union, aside from avoiding metaphysical complications also seeks to preserve the divine freedom proper to God. If Cyril's hypostatic union warrants the fear of a *tertium quid* in the historical Jesus, it then raises the like concern in the immanent life of God. Contradictions then follow: God is made something other than God; he is shown to be mutable; he is driven to action by creatures. Escaping these conclusions permits a fresh understanding of the simplistic moral union familiar to us. Far from a mere harmony of two distinct wills, the voluntary union signifies the free ordaining of God's good will. By this, the union *kat' eudokian* illumines the right metaphysical union *kata prosōpon*. Bethune-Baker confirms this reading when he writes:[40]

> [T]he term [*eudokia*] is used to safeguard the voluntariness of the condescension by which He who was God became man. God the Word of His own good pleasure becomes incarnate... [it] is the outcome and free and unconstrained expression of God's love for man: remaining what He is in being and in nature, he takes to Himself in the Person of the Word the being and nature of man.

In Nestorius' thought, a natural union implies a prior sustaining cause. Thus, a natural union, aside from imposing on divine freedom, would itself demand an explanatory cause. It is only in the mode of volition that one can account for an unconfused union.

Finally, it behoves us to give brief mention of the final expression in Nestorius surrounding union: *synapheia*. Generally rendered as "conjunction," it has often been rejected as a problematically weak descriptor for the incarnational union. Other translations ("contact" or "cohesion")[41] have been offered, alongside the fact that mention of *henōsis* (a markedly

---

[39] And even then, we might count this as a shortcoming of his reasoning rather than his intentions. See H. E. W. Turner, "Nestorius Reconsidered", *Studia Patristica* 13 (1975): 321.

[40] Bethune-Baker, *Nestorius and His Teaching*, 94. Admittedly, this theme in Nestorius is seldom addressed in the available literature, and to no great depth. Nevertheless, I take the positing of the question against Cyril's hypostatic formula, Nestorius' own admission of puzzlement, and further textual evidence to reveal this understanding of "good will" as a key point of Nestorius' Christology, and accordingly, an area demanding greater research. See Nestorius, *Bazaar*, 36-41,178-179.

[41] Bethune-Baker, *Nestorius*, 90-91. Bethune-Baker also provides the point that the *synapheia – henōsis* dichotomy is, to the mind of Nestorius, a false one.

stronger expression) outnumbers that of conjunction.[42] One should here note the role that ancient scientific categories played in directing Nestorius' pen toward the apparently weaker "conjunction." Classical learning provided various classes of change and production.[43] Conscious of the problems their export beyond the natural sciences would bear, Nestorius' opts for a distinct label in discussing the Incarnation. Though far from any natural scientific inquiry, one can yet see how the proclivity of stronger phraseology to misunderstanding made the Nestorian formulations inevitable.[44] Even with this scruple in mind, Nestorius' *synapheia* cannot be dismissed as a merely nominal union. As Bethune-Baker notes, this same conjunction informs the Nestorian speech of either nature's glorification in the single Christ.[45]

vi.   Situating Nestorius

Having considered the basic themes in Nestorius, and having proposed a right understanding of the same, we find ourselves in the position to schematise his Christology, according to the central concepts he employs, before assessing the extent to which Nestorius was Nestorian. Let us structure the above divisions once more, in light of our discussion of union.

fig. 2 Exchange of Prosopic Attributes

---
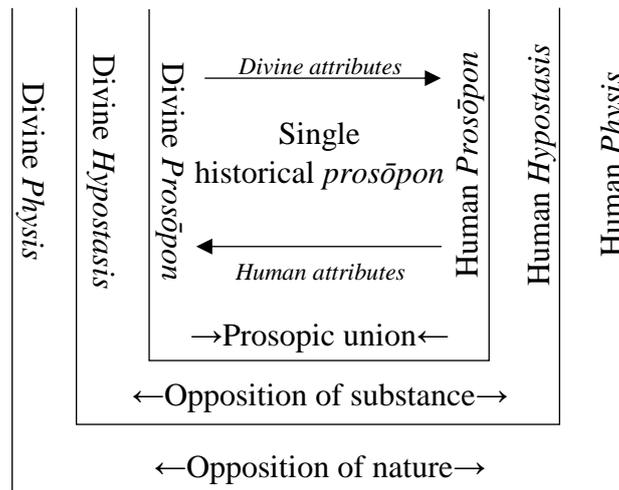
[42] Mark Dickens, "Nestorius Did Not Intend to Argue That Christ Had a Dual Nature, but That View Became Labeled Nestorianism" in *Popular Controversies in World History: Investigating History's Intriguing Question*s, Steven Laurence Danver, ed., (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 156.

[43] As in *krasis*, *mixis* or *sygchysis*. Bethune-Baker, *Nestorius and His Teaching,* 91. Nestorius' awareness of such divisions of combination is evident when he writes: "Neither by mixture and confusion nor by a change of *ousia*, nor again by a natural change of composition of the humanity, is he conceived." Nestorius, *Bazaar,* 220. Cf. 171.

[44] Viz. the misunderstanding which he recognised as the chief deficiency of a hypostatic union – a confusion of natures, human and divine, into something distinct. Nestorius, *Bazaar,* 327.

[45] Bethune-Baker, *Nestorius and His Teaching,* 91.

The diagram echoes the basic point of the preceding representation, namely that there exists one sphere of union alone – the prosopic – with the substantial and essential domains of *hypostasis* and nature being necessarily opposed. It supplies, however, an understanding of the various attributes in either *prosōpa* as mutually related through a union of exchange and conjunction. Either *prosōpon* makes use of the other,[46] with their mutual orientation about the single pole of Christ Incarnate constituting the grounds of their union.[47]

Where then ought one to place Nestorius? Despite the shared lexicon of Cyril, Nestorius and the greater tradition, we have seen the key terms to be met with considerably nuanced, if not wholly divergent, meanings. Even internally these terms were confused, most especially in the ambiguous *prosōpon,* further muddled by its irregular numerical predication. Be that as it may, Nestorius employed greater consistency than Cyril in his use of technical terms and was able to expound his metaphysics of the Incarnation more clearly.[48] We saw his view to be very much compatible with orthodox faith, insofar as his commitment to true and complete natures (fully God, fully man), a single unified subject (a single Person in Christ), and a mutual use of attributes (something akin to a *communicatio idiomatum*)[49] formed the touchstone of his Christology. In addition to this, a methodological strength is to be found in Nestorius. Recalling the revelatory function of the single *prosōpon*, Nestorius establishes Christ as the means to the Father,[50] the single source of revelation,[51] and the unified object of our faith and adoration,[52] "begin[ning not] from God the Word… but from him from whom the fathers began"[53] – a bottom-up movement appreciative of the divine initiative, and personal nature, of Christian Revelation.[54] Following all this, *Christokos* (the catalyst of this entire controversy) assumes an orthodox sense, emphasising the incarnational union without any confusion of nature.[55] Christ *qua* God has no mother, and it is with this understanding in mind that Nestorius rejects the title of *Theotokos*. Phrased another way, *Theotokos* or *anthrōpotokos* (in Nestorius' mind) make

---

[46] Nestorius, *Bazaar,* 207.

[47] Nestorius, *Bazaar,* 237-238. The confusion of pronouns may seem to push Nestorius to familiar Nestorianism. Yet, this apparent duplication of persons is resolved when one notes the contextual reference to the humanity as to "flesh" i.e. something impersonal, but not aprosopic – in turn affirming our establishes reading of *prosōpon*.

[48] Bethune-Baker, *Nestorius and His Teaching,* 53.

[49] A suggestion echoed in Turner as a *communicatio prosōpōn*.

[50] In both an epistemic and soteriological way, with certain of Christ's schematic operations making known the *prosōpon* of God.

[51] "…with a view to revelation he carried out all the operations of his *prosōpon*." Nestorius, *Bazaar,* 147.

[52] Nestorius, *Bazaar,* 61, 220-221, 238, 312-313.

[53] Nestorius, *Bazaar,* 146. Cf. 153, 171.

[54] Against Armitage's critique of a static Christology. Armitage, *A Twofold Solidarity*, 115.

[55] For "[o]ne indeed is the name [Christ] which indicates two [natures]." Nestorius, *Bazaar,* 209.

reference to either one of the distinct *prosōpa* in Christ.[56] It is *Christokos* that speaks of the entire incarnational reality, of the historical *prosōpon* of the union.[57]

There are, however, serious features lacking in his Christology. Even if the system, as we have explained it here, is defensible as consistent and orthodox, it fails to locate clearly a personal core or subject of the Incarnation. If the two *prosōpa*, as collections of attributes, powers and appearances, form one *prosōpon* only as through conjunction, one may rightly question the reality or depth of this union. Cyril's Christology locates the personal centre of consciousness in the divine *hypostasis*. It does, however, risk either a confusion of essence or a metaphysically empty notion of *hypostasis*, void of any qualitative content.[58] The benefit of Nestorius' answer is that it avoids these complications, with his wanting identification of a personal core being easily resolved by supplying or further dividing terms.[59]

Was Nestorius then a Nestorian? Understanding Nestorianism as a commitment to a bi-personal Christology, our examination of the *Bazaar* would suggest an answer in the negative. The unique meaning of *prosōpon* in Nestorius evades any doubling of personal subjects and thus redeems the widely misunderstood notion of a moral or voluntary union. His commitments to substantial and essential distinctiveness, the unity of Christ, and the primacy of the Word Incarnate as the way to the Father are all admirable foci of a sound Christology. Turner classes Nestorius' shortcoming as having complicated otherwise sound convictions through confused theorising.[60] Whether the confusion lay in his thought or its critics is a separate concern. What our findings have shown is that the Nestorius of the *Bazaar* remained committed to the basic tenets of orthodox Christianity, even if their theological reconciliation came short of a complete and perfect synthesis, and the rulings of Ephesus ultimately fell against him.[61]

---

[56] Loofs recognises some degree of acceptance of *Theotokos* in Nestorius. Nevertheless, Nestorius' preference falls on *Christokos*, accepting "God-bearer" only when coupled and contrasted with "man-bearer." Loofs, *Nestorius*, 28. Nestorius, *Bazaar*, 99, 148, 185, 193, 387.

[57] Nestorius reasons with the scriptural idiom in mind. The biblical descriptor of "Christ" (or Son or Lord) in reference to the God-man is taken as denoting the single *prosōpon* of union, e.g. "Christ was born," (Matt 1:16, *Bazaar*, 99) "born in the flesh, Christ," (Rom 9:5, *Bazaar* 99). Or consider his Passion, for which one will "not find… [in the New Testament] that death is imputed unto God… but unto Christ" (*Bazaar*, 258, drawing on Rom 5:10 and Heb 1:1-2). Such is the case for Nestorius, who takes "the name of Christ… [to be] indicative of two natures" (*Bazaar*, 260).

[58] The danger, admittedly, arises when this language is carried over to the Trinity as in Nestorius, *Bazaar,* 247. One might understand this less in Modalist terms than regard Nestorius' conception of Trinitarian *prosōpa* as a marker of function relations.

[59] The simplest solution to my mind involves the clear and exclusive designation of the confused terms *ousia* and *hypostasis* to distinct items in Christ viz. according to their modern Trinitarian meanings (*hypostasis* as Person, *ousia* as substance or essence). Thus, in the second figure one would substitute *hypostasis* for an *ousia*, with *hypostasis* (assuming the theological meaning of Person) supplied on the divine side alone.

[60] Turner, "Nestorius Reconsidered", 321. Also, Kyle, "Nestorius," 81-83.

[61] We have not here entertained the canonical question surrounding Nestorius, raised by the likes of Jugie, who claims "that [in the question of Nestorius' orthodoxy] even the doctrine of the infallibility of the Pope is at stake"

Bibliography

Anastos, Milton V. "Nestorius was Orthodox" *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 16 (1962): 117-140.

Armitage, J. Mark. A Twofold Solidarity: *Leo the Great's Theology of Redemption*. Strathfield: St Pauls, 2005.

Braaten, Carl E. "Modern Interpretations of Nestorius" *Church History* 32, no. 3 (1963): 251-267.

Bethune-Baker, J. F. *Nestorius and His Teaching: A Fresh Examination of the Evidence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1908.

Bevan, George. "Nestorius of Constantinople" in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Patristics*. Edited by Ken Parry. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2015.

Chesnut, Roberta C. "The Two Prosopa in Nestorius' 'Bazaar of Heracleides' *The Journal of Theological Studies* 29, no. 2 (October 1978): 392-40.

Cyril of Alexandria. *Letters 1-50*. Translated by John I. McEnerney. (The Fathers of the Church Series, vol. 76) Washington DC: CUA Press, 1987

———. *On the Unity of Christ*. Translated by John A. McGuckin. New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995.

Dickens, Mark and Annette Morrow. "Nestorius Did Not Intend to Argue That Christ Had a Dual Nature, but That View Became Labeled Nestorianism" in *Popular Controversies in World History: Investigating History's Intriguing Question*s. Edited by Steven Laurence Danver. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2011, 145-173.

Grillmeier, Aloys. *Christ in Christian Tradition: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*. Translated by John Bowden. London: Mowbrays, 1975.

Hay, Andrew R. "A Personal Union: Reformed Christology and the Question of the *Communicatio Idiomatum*" *Journal of Early Modern Christianity* 2, no. 1 (2015): 1–18.

Hefele, Charles Joseph. *A History of the Council of the Church, from the Original Documents*. Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1883.

Hodgson, Leonard. "The Metaphysics of Nestorius" *The Journal of Theological Studies* 19, no. 73 (1917): 46-55.

Kyle, Richard, "Nestorius: The Partial Rehabilitation of a Heretic" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 32, no. 1 (1989): 73-83.

Loofs, Friedrich. *Nestorius and His Place in the History of Christian Doctrine*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914.

(see Braaten, "Modern Interpretations of Nestorius," 260). To this, one may respond that Nestorius' opinions, and not his person, were condemned at the council, with the historical question of his exact personal opinion falling outside the scope of faith and morals to which the question of papal infallibility is necessarily confined. In fact, our question here – was Nestorius Nestorian? – may be fittingly reformulated as the question: did Ephesus condemn Nestorius or Nestorianism?

Mueller, S. "Fuitne Nestorius Revera Nestorianus?" *Gregorianum: Commentarii de Re Theologica et Philosophica* 2 (1921):

McGuckin, John A. *Saint Cyril of Alexandria and the Christological Controversy*. New York: Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004.

Nestorius. *The Bazaar of Heracleides*. G. R. Driver and Leonard Hodgson, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2002.

———. *Le Livre D'Héraclide de Damas*. Translated by F. Nau. Edited by Paul Bedjan. Paris: Letouzay et Ane, 1910.

Patrologiae cursus completes: Series Graeca (PG) 161 vols. Edited by J. -P. Migne. Paris, 1857-66.

Patrologiae cursus completes: Series Latina (PL) 217 vols. Edited by J. -P. Migne. Paris, 1844-55.

Russell, Norman. *Cyril of Alexandria*. London, Routledge, 2000.

Tanner, Norman P. ed. *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*. London: Sheed and Ward, 1990.

Turner, H.E.W. "Nestorius Reconsidered", *Studia Patristica* 13 (1975): 306-321.

Weinandy, Thomas G. and Daniel A. Keating, eds. *The Theology of St Cyril of Alexandria: A Critical Appreciation*. London: T & T Clark, 2003.